This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

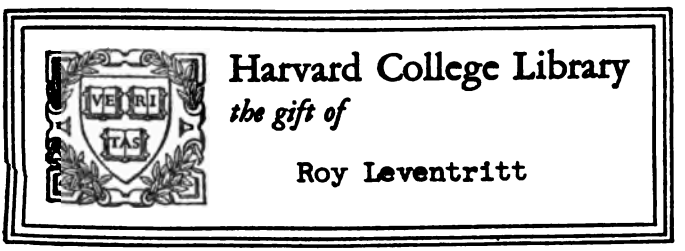
HN 5SCP 0

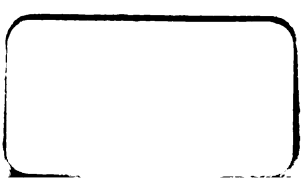
Whitewash

Horace Annesley Vachell

Digitized by Google

PZ 7222.93





Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

WHITEWASH

HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL

Digitized by Google

By HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL

NOVELS

WHITEWASH
THE SOUL OF SUSAN YELLAM
SOME HAPPENINGS
FISHPINGLE
THE TRIUMPH OF TIM
SPRAGGE'S CANYON
QUINNEY'S
LOOT
BLINDS DOWN
JOHN VERNEY
THE OTHER SIDE

PLAYS

QUINNEY'S
SEARCHLIGHTS
JELF'S

GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY
NEW YORK

Digitized by Google

WHITEWASH

BY

HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL

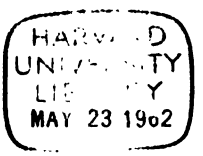
Author of "The Soul of Susan Yellam," "Fishpingle," "Quinney's," etc., etc.

NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

Digitized by Google

PZ 7222.93

Copyright, 1920,
By George H. Doran Company



Printed in the United States of America

Digitized by Google

TO

MORLEY ROBERTS

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	LADY SELINA CHANDOS	9
II	HENRY GRIMSHAW	40
III	CUPID SPEEDS HIS SHAFTS	66
IV	CHIEFLY CONCERNING CICELY	95
V	TIDDY APPEARS	127
VI	GRIMSHAW RETURNS	156
VII	TIDDY AND CICELY	186
VIII	PEARLS OF DEW	232
IX	TIMOTHY FARLEIGH	239
X	UNDER THE VILLAGE TREE	267
XI	REVOLUTION	297
XII	RECONSTRUCTION	320

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

WHITEWASH

CHAPTER I

LADY SELINA CHANDOS

I

LADY SELINA laid down her pen—a quill—smiling pensively. Early in life she had been taught to smile by a mother with half a dozen attractive but dowerless daughters, who had smiled themselves obediently into wives and matrons. Critics admitted that the smile had quality. No derision twisted it. Artlessly, with absolute sincerity, Lady Selina scattered her smiles as largesse. Royalties know the value of such smiles, and so do politicians.

Her eyes—blue, heavily-lidded, with arched brows above them—wandered from her desk, the desk of a busy lady of the manor, to the portrait of her late husband which hung above the chimney-piece. Henry Chandos had been her senior by some five and twenty years. During another quarter of a century of tranquil married life Lady Selina had loved, honoured and obeyed him as the dominant partner. A stranger, looking at the portrait, might have guessed that the Squire of Upworthy—if physiognomy is to be trusted (which it isn't)—was likely to inspire honour and obedience rather than love. An uncompromising chin, a *Wellingtonia gigantea* nose and steel-grey eyes overhung by beetling brows, bespoke the autocrat. He wore a stained

Digitized by Google

red hunting coat and grasped a hunting horn in his left hand. Hounds came swiftly to the toot of that horn; and eager horsemen, you may be sure, followed at a respectful distance. Henry Chandos never bullied his "field." He checked "thrusters" with a glance. The wags christened him "Old Gimlets." And in the County Council, upon the Bench, in and out of his own house, he exercised a gift of silence. His neighbours knew that he took his own line over any country regardless of obstacles. If damage ensued he paid for it generously.

When at work in her sitting-room, Lady Selina was always conscious of her husband's portrait, sensible that his counterfeit presentment looked down approvingly upon her labours. He, too, had worked hard in this fine room, and since his death the widow had carried on that work along his lines, as, with his last breath, he had entreated her to do.

She rose from her chair and crossed to the sofa on which were piled many red flannel cloaks. On a table lay pound packages of tea, and a small basket holding gills of gin discreetly covered with a white napkin. These were her particular gifts to her own people, to be bestowed presently, *coram publico,* before tea was served on the lawn beneath the approving eyes of the doctor, parson, and such of the local gentry as might "drop in."

As she rose, glancing at the neat piles of books and letters, a sigh escaped her. Nobody knew how much her work perplexed and bothered her. If her smile disarmed criticism, it was partly, perhaps, because pathos informed it. At times it seemed to say: "I want to please people, but it's horribly difficult." No business training had been vouchsafed her, except such knowledge as had come from dealing with servants and tradesmen. In the management of a large estate her husband had never consulted her. And yet

Digitized by Google

—a tremendous tribute—he had left her everything during her lifetime, scorning to impose any conditions should she marry again. Possibly he knew that she would not do so.

As she stood beside the sofa, plump and prosperous, erect mentally and physically, an intelligent child might have proclaimed her to be what she was, a superb specimen of the English châtelaine. Obviously a gentlewoman, courteous alike to the Lord-Lieutenant of her county or to the humblest of her many dependents, exacting respect from all and affection from many, she had just passed her fifty-fifth birthday. But her face remained free from wrinkles, smoothly pink as if glowing autumnally after a sunny summer; and her features were on the happiest terms with each other, firmly but delicately modelled, prominent, but not aggressively so.

She wore clothes of no particular mode that became her admirably. Her butler entered the room.

"Well, Stimson, what is it?"

Her voice was very pleasant and articulate. At the mere sound of it the austere face of the old retainer relaxed. Deprecatingly, he informed his mistress that Mr. Goodrich had arrived.

Lady Selina frowned slightly. Her guests had been invited for four. It was not yet half-past three.

"Show Mr. Goodrich on to the lawn. Tell him, with my compliments, that I will join him there in a few minutes."

"Very good, my lady. Mr. Goodrich expressed a wish to see your ladyship before the others came."

Lady Selina retorted sharply:

"Bless the man! Why couldn't you say so at once? I'll see Mr. Goodrich here."

Stimson withdrew. Lady Selina returned to her desk and sat down. Perhaps she wished to impress her parson, an old friend, that she was busy. Beholding the lady of

Digitized by Google

the manor engrossed in multifarious duties, Mr. Goodrich might consider himself courteously admonished. None the less, she received him with a gracious smile, and expressed herself as glad to see him. The parson said genially:

"A charming day for our little fête."

As he sat down near her, Lady Selina eyed him interrogatively, divining something unpleasant. She was well aware that her general staff, so to speak, were self-trained in the art of what is now called "camouflage." She had learnt to distrust the smiles of others, knowing well that her own smiles often served to disguise her feelings.

Mr. Goodrich settled himself comfortably in his chair, and crossed a pair of shapely legs which in his opinion ought to wear gaiters, archdiaconal if not episcopal. He, too, like the lady of the manor, presented a plump and prosperous exterior to a changing and hypercritical world. From his relaxed, easy attitude one might guess that this was not a soldier of the church militant, the more robust physically because, perhaps, he habitually exercised his body instead of his mind, an indefatigable walker and talker rather than a thinker. He looked his best, indeed, from the back of a fat cob, not in the pulpit or at the lectern, although his perfectly tied white cravat was austerely clerical. Lady Selina wasted no time:

"You have something disagreeable to tell me?"

"No, no. Disagreeable is too strong a word. Worrying—m'yes. I dislike being appealed to in such matters."

"In what matters, my dear friend?"

"I went for a ride this morning, and—a—happened to look in upon old Ephraim Exton. He asked me to speak to you, and the day being so—a—propitious, I was beguiled against my better judgment into saying I would."

His slight hesitations did not annoy Lady Selina. She accepted them as homage, a soaping of the ways, a desire

Digitized by Google

upon the part of her staff to "spare" their chief anything approximating to a shock. But she said humorously:

"Then why don't you?"

The parson smiled at her, nodding his handsome head.

"Old Ephraim is sorely troubled about his best cow."

"But I'm not a cow doctor."

"No, no, but Ephraim thinks that the trouble is not so much with the cow, a valuable animal, so he tells me, but with the cowhouse. He thinks it needs rebuilding."

Lady Selina said trenchantly:

"You mean he said so to you?"

"M'yes. Not that he complained. He pointed out to me that the roof might fall in on top of the cows."

Lady Selina laughed, but her forehead was not quite smooth as she replied:

"I see, Ephraim Exton didn't complain, but he persuaded you to do it. Really, the old fellow is quite hopeless."

Mr. Goodrich nodded.

"M'yes; he so impressed me this morning." Then he added genially:

"His son, John, is a bright young fellow—um?"

"Bright? He may brighten into a fire-brand. He labels himself Socialist. I shall do my duty, Mr. Goodrich."

The parson purred pleasantly, rubbing his hands.

"You'll rebuild the cowsheds——? How good of you——!"

"No." She spoke sharply. "The man's a fool to house delicate high-bred stock in ramshackle buildings. I've remitted part of his rent."

"We all know how kind you are about that."

Lady Selina made a deprecating gesture. Then, with her usual energy, she set forth her case as against that of her tenant. Because of certain concessions, Exton had undertaken to keep the farm buildings in reasonable repair.

Digitized by Google

But the money which ought to have been spent on roofs had been diverted to the speculative purchase of valuable stock. The parson lent an attentive and sympathetic ear, but he had heard the tale before. One word explained the trouble as between landlord and tenant—Compromise. Secretly, he was of opinion that outside repairs should be done by landlords, regardless of other concessions, but he didn't say so to the lady of the manor. Plain speech meant an indictment of Gridley, the bailiff, the power behind the throne. Lady Selina might send for Gridley. Indeed she had done so before. And always Gridley—bother him!—got the best of such talk.

Lady Selina ended on the highest note.

"Gridley wants me to give Exton notice to quit."

"Oh, dear! Won't that be very disagreeable?"

"Very. Do you shirk doing your duty, Mr. Goodrich, when it happens to be disagreeable?"

The parson answered quite truthfully: "Sometimes."

Lady Selina smiled graciously, and the smile deepened as her two children entered from the lawn. Brian, the son, was a handsome young man of twenty-eight, a dashing hussar, cut to pattern. Cicely deserves more attention. She had been born ten years after her brother, arriving on earth as a surprise packet, so to speak. Intelligence sparkled in her soft brown eyes, a charming alertness, often so distinctively the attribute of children born to parents no longer young. Nobody could call her a beauty. The rather smug comeliness of regular features had been denied her. But her colouring was excellent, the clear red and brown of the out-o'-doors girl. Her laugh warmed the cockles of all hearts; her manners made her welcome everywhere. Fortunately for her, she had been sent to school, much to the surprise of Lady Selina's kinsmen. At school she had achieved some sort of detachment from the cut-and-dried

Digitized by Google

traditions of Upworthy Manor. None could call her a rebel, but in less robust moments her mother wondered whether the daring experiment had been altogether a success. She could read her son easier than her daughter.

Brian said gaily:

"The goodies are weighing in, Mums." Then he turned to the parson, holding out his hand. "And how are you coming up this fine day, Mr. Goodrich?"

The parson shook his head. "I don't know that I'm coming up, Brian." He smiled paternally at the young man whom he had baptised and confirmed, adding regretfully: "I'm toddling down the shady slopes of sixty. Cicely, my dear, how well you look!"

"Thank you, Mr. Goodrich."

Brian approached the sofa.

"Shall we cart out this stuff?" he asked.

"One moment."

Brian's blue eyes lingered upon his mother's serious face.

"Hullo! What's up? You look portentous."

"I am worried, my dear."

"Poor old Mums! What about?"

She hesitated, glancing at the parson now erect upon the hearthrug and smiling blandly. As a rule, Lady Selina acted after much indecision, and discussed—not too often—her actions afterwards. But at this particular moment she felt upset, cornered by circumstances, upon the sharp horns of a dilemma. She had never evicted a tenant. To do so was intolerably unpleasant. But these Extons, complaining behind her back, for ever leaving undone what they had promised to do, exasperated her beyond bearing. She answered her son quietly:

"The Extons. Tell me your candid opinion of Ephraim Exton."

Brian replied promptly:

Digitized by Google

"One of the best."

"Best of what?"

"Best of the best."

Cicely murmured derisively:

"How illuminating!"

"Shut up, Cis. Mother knows what I mean."

"I don't," said Lady Selina. "Your best of the best is always behind with his rent."

Goodrich interposed a seasonable word. He was prepared to side with Brian against his august mother. The bishop of the diocese had been appointed by a Liberal Prime Minister. His lordship held advanced views upon the right administration of landed estates.

"He is a sound Churchman, Lady Selina."

"Can you say as much of his son?" asked Lady Selina.

"'Um! Laodicean. I admit it—Laodicean."

"Fiddle! John Exton is a free-thinker. Children——!"

Brian and Cicely looked at her gravely. Cicely realised that her mother was dredging, as she called it, anxious to sweep public opinion into her net. And Cicely, not Brian, was well aware that public opinion counted with the lady of the manor, although she never admitted as much.

Lady Selina said with intense solemnity:

"I believe it is my duty to give Ephraim Exton notice to quit."

Cicely exclaimed vehemently:

"Darling Mother, please don't!"

Brian shrugged his shoulders, muttering:

"I went ferreting with old Ephraim. That ought to count."

Cicely gave a better reason.

"The Extons were on the land here before us. That ought to count."

Digitized by Google

Very wisely the parson held his tongue. Lady Selina replied tartly:

"My dears, the Extons may be here after us, if I allow sentiment to overrule common sense."

Having repeated this golden axion so often on the lips of her late husband, Lady Selina paused to stare at the lugubrious countenance of her butler who had entered the room as she was speaking.

"Bless me! Stimson? Has the roof fallen in?"

"Not yet, my lady. The carrier has forgotten the buns."

"No buns! I shall have to give the dear children pennies instead."

She hurried out to find the necessary coppers, followed leisurely by Stimson. Brian laughed.

"What a situation! My Lady Bountiful—bunless!"

Cicely crossed the room, and laid her hand upon the parson's sleeve, looking up into his pleasant face.

"Oh, Mr. Goodrich, this is awful."

"Well, well, Cicely, really, you know, the little ones would sooner have pennies."

Cicely stared at him in amazement. Perhaps, for the first time, she beheld her pastor as one concerned with parochial trifles oblivious of great issues. She said almost gaspingly:

"I'm speaking of the Extons. Surely, surely, it can't be Mother's duty to turn out such old tenants."

At this Brian pulled himself together. Cis, evidently, was getting out of hand.

"You can bet your boots, Cis, that Mums knows best. Don't you run riot, old thing! Any fool can see that she loathes the job as much as you do."

"I suppose so," Cicely admitted reluctantly. "And if Mr. Goodrich thinks Mother right——?" She looked at the parson, interrogatively.

Digitized by Google

"Exton is certainly an unlucky farmer, still——"

"Suppose Mother turns him out, and suppose it kills him? Everybody will say that she has done him in."

Mr. Goodrich raised an expostulatory finger.

"Done him in? What an expression!"

Brian, meanwhile, had sauntered up to the open window. Suddenly he turned.

"Dr. Pawley is outside. Oughtn't I to ask him in here?"

"Of course," said Cicely. "And we'll find out what he thinks."

II

Dr. Pawley had introduced both Brian and Cicely to this wicked world. Failing in health and energy, he carried with him a kind, whimsical face, slightly sunk between high, narrow shoulders. Chronic sciatica made him limp a little. In the pockets of his ill-fitting rusty coat he carried sugar-plums which he popped deftly into the mouths of howling children. From this it may be inferred that he was not an up-to-date practitioner, and perhaps the more beloved in Upworthy on that account. An old bachelor of small independent means, Lady Selina had long ago accepted him as a friend and counsellor. He dined at the Manor constantly in those remote days when medical attendants were rarely offered luncheon. County magnates were less supercilious when they remarked the esteem which Dr. Pawley had inspired in Henry Chandos and his wife. And ultimately they, too, accepted him and entertained him, almost regarding him as one of themselves. Pawley himself knew that he owed his somewhat unique position in the county to Lady Selina. Unbefriended by her, he would have remained obscure and ignored by the quality. She gave him the opportunity which he had seized. After that he had held his own as a talker and a listener. And he scorned

Digitized by Google

gossip, although he might swallow it with a faint smile curving his thin, sensitive lips.

Cicely greeted him warmly.

"How nice of you to come to our tea-fight."

"How are you, Pawley?" asked the parson.

"I'm not pulling my weight, Goodrich. People make cheap jokes about doctors and a sickly season, but I want a partner and a holiday, and I mean to have both."

He sat down near Cicely, who said hastily:

"Why is there always sickness in Upworthy at midsummer?"

Some inflection in her young voice challenged attention. Goodrich blinked; Pawley thought to himself: "At last, the inevitable question——!" Temptation assailed him to evade it. And such evasion might be justified by his sense of loyalty and gratitude to Lady Selina. Nevertheless some truth-compelling quality in her glance made him answer simply:

"Our people aren't too healthy, my dear."

"Why—why?"

"Partly a matter of drainage; wages are low. That means insufficient nutrition, eh, Goodrich?"

"Quite so; quite so."

Cicely turned to Brian, who was again at the window, watching the arriving villagers.

"Brian, do you hear? Dr. Pawley says the village drains are wrong."

Brian laughed carelessly.

"Drains? There aren't any. Mother says open drainage is the best in villages. She knows."

"Does she?" Once more her eyes seemed to fix themselves inexorably upon Pawley's pale face. "Does Mother really know, Dr. Pawley? Has she ever taken expert advice, for instance?"

Digitized by Google

"As to that, my dear child, the fact is we are comfortably antediluvian."

Cicely digested this, turning troubled orbs from doctor to parson, sensible of tension, and—with the inherited instincts of a fox-hunter—keenly aware that her quarry was escaping. She said with something of her mother's air of finality:

"Are we? Then the deluge is coming." In a different voice, charmingly persuasive, she went on: "And now, dear doctor, I want to talk to you about something else of tremendous importance."

"How you frighten me!"

She smiled at him.

"You're a rare favourite with Mother. You and—and Mr. Goodrich"—the parson was included as a happy afterthought—"are levers."

"Levers? Bless me!"

"Yes. I always think of Mother as a sort of fixed star, but you two can move her. And your influence with her is the greater because you hardly ever exercise it."

The parson accepted this as an indictment, and looked uneasy. Pawley's eyes twinkled, as the girl continued:

"Mother is thinking of evicting the Extons."

Pawley's eyes stopped twinkling.

"Bless my soul!"

"Brian and I are dead against it, aren't we, Brian?"

Again the young man laughed, not heartlessly. Cicely, under the stress of excitement, amused him. And excitement became her. She looked—topping. At the same time she was riding for a fall. He must shout out: "'Ware wire!" He did so.

"This isn't our business, Cis."

"But it is. Eventually, I suppose, Upworthy will go to you."

Digitized by Google

"Oh no, not necessarily. Mother has a power of appointment. If I ran rusty, b'Jove, Mother might feel it her duty to leave Upworthy to George Chandos."

"You selfish pig——!"

"Children, my dear children!" The parson lifted his hand. Cicely said crossly:

"You're all sitting on the fence."

"We're men of peace," murmured the parson.

Instantly Cicely became penitent. "I'm ever so sorry. Doctor, can you give me something not too nasty to cure a quick temper?"

Pawley chuckled.

"There's no state of savage irritation which can't be mitigated by the exhibition of a little calomel."

"Do you take that?"

"No. In my case it isn't necessary. Now, what do you want a tired old man to do?"

Cicely replied promptly:

"Pull the popularity stop."

"Eh?"

"You jolly well know what I mean. You're much cleverer than you look, dear doctor."

As she spoke Lady Selina majestically entered the room, pausing in horror as Cicely's clear tones penetrated her ears and her understanding.

"My darling child! What are you saying to Dr. Pawley?"

"He is, Mums. Every doctor ought to be. To look clever is rather alarming. To be clever and not look it is so very reassuring."

Lady Selina held out her hand to her old friend, saying graciously:

"Very glad to see you, doctor. Brian, you can take the cloaks on to the lawn."

Digitized by Google

"Let me help you," said the parson.

The two men disappeared with arms full of red flannel cloaks. Cicely, standing close to Pawley, laughed.

"Why do you laugh, child?" asked Lady Selina.

"Only because Mr. Goodrich is a man of peace." She nudged Pawley, much to her mother's astonishment.

"Why are you nudging Dr. Pawley?"

"Was I? Well, yes, I was. He's a man of peace, too. I want him to say something before we go on to the lawn."

"Oh! You want him to say something which apparently can't be said without nudging. What is it?"

Cicely slipped to her mother's side, taking her arm and pressing it coaxingly.

"Dr. Pawley knows how worry affects you, don't you, doctor?"

"Worry affects all of us."

Lady Selina's face relaxed beneath the pressure of Cicely's arm.

"But I'm not worrying, you silly child."

"Oh, Mother——! Not worrying about the poor Extons? You said you were just now."

"For the moment I had forgotten the Extons. Yes, yes, I must take action at once, because to-morrow is Midsummer Day."

She moved, like a line-of-battle ship, to her desk, and picked up an Estate ledger. Cicely made a sign to Pawley, who shook his head dubiously. Lady Selina, after a pause, said austerely:

"It's as I thought. I must give Ephraim Exton a year's notice from to-morrow, or lose a quarter. Cicely, send Agatha Farleigh to me. She's on the lawn."

Agatha was Lady Selina's typist, and a protégée, a daughter of the village, who, by virtue of a lively intelligence, had been taught typewriting and stenography at the expense of the lady of the manor.

Digitized by Google

Cicely refused to budge, exclaiming loudly:

"If you turn out that old man, Mums, I don't want to be here next November."

"Next November?"

"You'll be burnt in effigy on the village green. Guy Fawkes' Day!"

"Rubbish! Run away and send Agatha to me."

Cicely, in desperation, turned to Dr. Pawley.

"Doctor, have you nothing to say?"

Pawley sighed, shrugging his shoulders. In a tired voice, he said quietly:

"The Extons are much liked, Lady Selina."

Lady Selina closed the Estate ledger, standing very erect, unconsciously assuming the pose of her late husband. But she spoke pleasantly, suppressing a rising exasperation. Pawley's pale face affected her. And he had grown old in her service, a loyal friend. Certainly she owed him consideration. After tea, she might talk with him—alone.

"Well, well, the letter can be written any time before eight. I shall give my dear people their tea." She moved slowly to the open window, turning on the threshold, smiling confidently. "I am not afraid of becoming unpopular with them."

As she swept out, Cicely whispered to Pawley:

"All is well. She won't write the letter. Ah, doctor, you didn't half back me up."

He took both her hands, looking gravely into her eager face.

"I am an old man, my dear, and I am devoted to your mother. Shall we follow her on to the lawn?"

III

The lawns of Upworthy Manor sloped from the house to the topiary garden. This topiary garden was famous

Digitized by Google

for its size and construction. In pre-war days, some ten men were kept constantly at work from March to October trimming the yews and mowing and rolling the grass alleys. Lady Selina regarded it with reverence. Cicely hated it, but dared not say so. The trimness and primness of it all affected her oddly. Apart from the waste of labour which the care of such an absurdity involved, it symbolised what she had learned at school to dislike and distrust—artificial clipping of Nature. A yew, left to its own devices, was a glorious tree, intimately associated with the history and expansion of England, furnishing the long bows of Agincourt even as later the great oaks were transformed miraculously into the wooden walls that kept our shore inviolate. To turn a yew into a peacock seemed to Cicely a monstrous perversion. And, as a child, looking out of her nursery window by moonlight, she envisaged the dark beasts and birds coming to life, and preying mercilessly upon beloved creatures such as lambs and puppies and kittens. There was a legend, too, in the family, babbled by nursemaids, that the Chandos who had laid out the topiary garden had designed it as a sort of prison for a young and beautiful wife of whom he was morbidly jealous. She had never been suffered to stray far from the walled-in alleys and tunnels. The story had a tincture of truth in it, no more, quite enough to fire the fancy of an imaginative child.

Upon fête days the villagers were graciously permitted to wander at will through the topiary garden.

By the time that Cicely reached the lawn most of Lady Selina's people had assembled about the tea-tables. Cicely joined Brian. Her mother was standing near the parson, who, with uplifted hand and voice, addressed the company:

"My dear friends, once more we meet in this charming garden, where we have enjoyed so often the gracious hos-

Digitized by Google

pitality of the Lady of the Manor." (Cheers.) "Lady Selina desires me to thank you for this kind reception, and I am quite sure that you wish me to thank her on your behalf for her continued bounty and the good creature comforts which we are about to enjoy. The gifts soon to be bestowed on the aged and infirm are very precious oblations——"

At this point the speaker was shrilly interrupted by a small boy, not ill-looking, but presenting a vacuous countenance to all beholders, and regarded by them as the village softy.

"What do Pa'son say?"

Everybody smiled compassionately. Nick Farleigh, a cousin of Lady Selina's typist, was regarded as quite harmless and on occasion a source of innocent amusement. Mr. Goodrich answered him:

"Oblations, my young friend, mean offerings, symbols of the love and affection which Lady Selina has shown to all of us, gentle and simple, ever since she came to Upworthy to reign over us with unremitting generosity and kindliness. In her name I bid you welcome."

More cheers.

Brian whispered to his sister:

"Old Goody lays it on a bit thick, but Mother has played the game, bless her."

The company sat down to tea. Cicely and Brian helped to wait, flitting here and there, talking to everybody. Nick said in a loud voice: "I be going to have a rare gorger."

"I like to see 'em tuck in," said Brian to Cicely.

"I don't know. It looks, doesn't it, as if they didn't have quite enough at home?"

After tea came the solemn bestowal of red cloaks, pounds of tea, and the gills of gin furtively bestowed upon the old women. Cicely found herself near Dr. Pawley.

Digitized by Google

"Timothy Farleigh isn't here," she said. "Is he ill?"

"I don't think so."

Cicely noticed an accent of restraint. She continued quickly: "I can't remember his ever coming to our bun-feasts, can you?" Pawley remained silent. Cicely decided that something was eluding her.

"Is there any reason why he shouldn't come?"

Her persistence amused and distressed an old friend. Obviously, she was on the hunt for accurate information. If he put her off a hot scent, she would return to it. And yet he shrank from telling the truth, although well aware that it would come more gently from his lips than from any others. Suddenly, so it seemed to him, a jolly girl had bloomed into a woman. He answered reluctantly:

"Yes."

"Do tell me the reason, please."

Dr. Pawley lowered his voice.

"You see, his two little girls died of diphtheria long ago."

"But what on earth has that got to do with his coming here? Surely he can't blame my mother?"

"I can't go into that with you, Cicely. Speaking personally, I blame John Gridley. He knew well enough that Farleigh's cottage was hardly fit for habitation."

Cicely stared at him.

"Why, it's the prettiest cottage in Upworthy."

As she spoke Lady Selina bore down upon them, in full sail before a brisk breeze of popularity. The Olympians had finished their tea; games were started by the children; the sun shone in cloudless skies.

"My congratulations," murmured Pawley, as Lady Selina paused in front of him.

"Yes; the dear things do appreciate what one does for them. I was just thinking to myself that this is England

Digitized by Google

at her best. Will you come back to my room, doctor? I want a word with you."

He followed her obediently, but Cicely thought that his courteous smile was slightly derisive. Her mother, of course, wanted to talk to him about the Extons. The old fellow would plead for them. Lady Selina, in high good humour, would be merciful.

And, quite easily, this came to pass. No promises were made, but Lady Selina nodded when Pawley discreetly hinted that it might be inexpedient to make martyrs of the Extons. Then, perceiving that enough had been said, he changed the talk.

"I am thinking of taking a partner," he began. "And I am happy to say that the right man is likely to come here to help me. You have heard of him, Henry Grimshaw."

Lady Selina shook her head.

"Grimmer," added Pawley.

"Grimmer? Dear me! Are you speaking of Brian's friend at Winchester? The wonderful Grimmer." She laughed. "At one time Brian gave us too much of—Grimmer. At school he was certainly a star of the first magnitude. What has he done since?"

Pawley could only furnish a few details. Grimshaw had distinguished himself as a student of medicine, taking several degrees. For some years he had overworked himself in Poplar. Comparative rest and good country air had been prescribed for him by a Harley Street specialist. Pawley added quietly:

"When he answered my advertisement, he mentioned his friendship for Brian at school."

"I shall welcome Brian's old friend cordially. I am glad that your partner is a public-school man."

"He isn't my partner yet, Lady Selina, but he has promised to run down to me and talk things over. It will be

Digitized by Google

much for him and all of us if he has your good-will. There is no doubt whatever of his capacity. I am lucky to secure so up-to-date a colleague."

"Up-to-date?" She barely winced. "I take it that you are speaking of him professionally. Surgery, I am told, has made immense strides, but medicine remains, doesn't it, very much where it was?"

"Grimshaw is a surgeon, Lady Selina. And up-to-date in that. For the rest I know nothing about him except this. In his two letters to me he expressed himself modestly. I should imagine that he will give undivided energies to his profession."

"He will have very little to do, it seems to me."

"Um. As to that I am not so sure."

"My people are wonderfully healthy."

"Some of them."

Lady Selina's eyes wandered to the lawn; through the open windows floated much laughter. Euphrosyne is surely the sister of Hygeia. And at that moment a patriarch was approaching, Nicodemus Burble, past eighty-one, and able to do a day's work in the fields. The lady of the manor said triumphantly:

"Ah, there's a fine specimen."

Nicodemus halted at the open window and touched his cap.

"Well, Nicodemus, how are you?"

"I bain't so wonnerful grand, my lady."

"Dear me! If your boots are clean, come you in, and tell me what you want."

Nicodemus removed his cap and entered cautiously. Lady Selina indicated a chair upon which the old man sat gingerly, staring about him. Lady Selina, after eyeing him keenly, said with unction:

"If I look half as well as you do when I'm past eighty

Digitized by Google

I shall be heartily thankful. Now, what can I do for you?"

"I be fair twisted into knots wi' they dratted rheumatics, my lady."

"Didn't you take the medicine which I asked Dr. Pawley to send you?"

"Be—utiful stuff, to be sure."

But he rubbed his knees as he spoke. Lady Selina examined him more critically. "Your medicine doesn't seem to have done him much good," she observed.

Pawley, who knew his man, said confidentially:

"Own up, Nicodemus, you poured my medicine down the sink."

Nicodemus gasped.

"Lard preserve our dear lives. How did 'ee know that, doctor?"

"So much of it has gone the same road," replied Pawley.

Nicodemus was never without a plausible excuse.

"It give me such a rampagin' in my innards as never was."

Lady Selina could not accept this as adequate.

"Now, Nicodemus, if you threw the medicine down the sink you didn't take it."

" 'Twas the same sart seemin'ly, my lady—all in same blue bottle. 'Tisn't physic I wants. 'Tis my roof that leaks so tarrible, and allers has done, allers—allers."

His voice droned away. Lady Selina said cheerfully:

"Your roof shall be mended."

"'Tis a new roof as be needed, my lady."

"Well, we'll see about that presently. You got the port wine I sent you?"

"Yes, my lady. I owes my long life to 'ee, my lady." He rose with difficulty. "Now I'll march homealong." He moved very stiffly to the window. Pawley rose also, intercepting him.

"You're going a bit short, granfer."

Digitized by Google

"'Tis my near leg, doctor."

"My car is outside. I'll run you down to your cottage. Take my arm."

Lady Selina smiled pleasantly as her two guests left her presence. In a well-ordered village gentle and simple moved together in just such harmonious relations. A pleasurable glow pervaded the tissues of mind and body. Her people were properly cared for. And they responded—to use a phrase of Dr. Pawley's—to humane treatment. The cheers of that fine summer's afternoon still echoed in her ears.

She sat down at her desk to tackle, with appetite, a small pile of unanswered letters.

IV

She was writing leisurely, when a noise outside distracted her attention. Noise, honest mirth, was to be expected upon such an occasion. But common decency imposed limits upon that. Above the noise, accentuating it, rose bucolic laughter, the laughter of the ale-house. Lady Selina walked to the window, frowning. As she walked a sentence rang out:

"Biff 'un again, Johnny, biff 'un again!"

Then she heard her son's voice raised commandingly, the voice of an officer on the parade ground.

"Shut up, you fellows, at once."

The noise died down; giggles succeeded.

Lady Selina stood still, listening. She could trust her son to deal drastically with anything approximating to a disturbance in her garden. That such a disturbance should take place amongst her guests filled her with dismay and astonishment.

She was enlightened forthwith by Brian, who entered hurriedly, rather flushed in the face.

Digitized by Google

"What has happened, Brian?"

"A little scrap, Mums."

"A little—scrap." She repeated the words incredulously.

"Yes; Johnny Exton and Gridley."

"You tell me that John Exton and Gridley have been fighting on my lawn. Send them to me immediately. What an outrage!"

Brian withheld comment. Within a minute the offenders appeared looking uncommonly sheepish. Brian ushered them into the presence, and closed the French windows against a grinning and inquisitive crowd. Lady Selina stared coldly at her bailiff. He presented a not too prepossessing appearance, being hatless and breathless, with his tie undone, his hair in disorder and a dash of blood upon his cheek. Hard eyes glared out of a weather-beaten face. Lady Selina hardly recognised her smug, obsequious Grand Vizier. She glanced swiftly at John Exton, the son of Ephraim. The young man bore no marks of the encounter, but he appeared to be still simmering with rage. Gridley was thick-set and slightly corpulent; John Exton was tall and slim. Lady Selina turned to her bailiff.

"What have you to say, Gridley?"

"He struck me first, my lady."

She addressed the young man, coldly.

"You struck my bailiff on my lawn?"

"On my cheek, my lady."

Gridley put his hand to his cheek, and discovering blood began to wipe it off with a bandana. John looked at the knuckles of his right hand, grinned, and hid his hand in his pocket. Lady Selina, judicially calm outwardly, continued:

"Kindly tell me, John Exton, why you, my guest this afternoon, struck another guest of mine?"

John fidgeted, blurting out the words:

"I'm not your guest, my lady."

Digitized by Google

"What do you mean?"

The young man replied sullenly:

"With things as they are at our farm, I haven't time, my lady, to be anybody's guest. Father put his money into valuable stock, and some of 'em are dying. We're pretty nigh desperate. Father told me to find Mr. Gridley this afternoon, and to ask for a little help. I went to his house. They told me he was here——"

"Yes, yes; but why did you strike him?"

Excitedly, he didn't pause to pick his words.

"Because, my lady, he's a bully and a brute."

Lady Selina made no attempt to hide her amazement. The young man spoke with such passion that he became impressive.

"Bless my soul! What do you answer to that, Gridley?"

Gridley answered fiercely:

"He's a liar."

Immediately Lady Selina's handsome face stiffened into impassivity.

"You forget yourself, my good man."

"Infernal cheek," muttered Brian.

Gridley cringed.

"I beg pardon, my lady. I'm your ladyship's servant. Young Exton said narsty things about you, my lady. Said you was responsible for the rotten conditions at his father's farm. That maddened me, my lady."

She turned once more to John Exton. He confronted her boldly but not brazenly, although it is likely that such a woman at such a time might mistake courage for defiance.

"Did you say that?"

"Something of the sort, my lady."

"And then——?"

Gridley answered eagerly:

"I spoke up for you, my lady. I told him that when you

Digitized by Google

lowered his father's rent three years ago it was understood that you were not responsible for the outside repairs."

"Which is perfectly true."

Gridley continued with less restraint, perceiving, possibly, that a little warmth of speech might be deemed pardonable:

"With that he flies out at me, my lady. I'd be ashamed to repeat his language to your ladyship. I aim to keep a clean tongue in my head, I do."

John interpolated quickly:

"Only when talking to her ladyship."

"Silence, please." She shot a disdainful glance at John and turned once more to her bailiff. Her voice became velvety.

"Tell me what John Exton said with—a—decent reservations."

Gridley began to inflate, striking an attitude and speaking in a loud, derisive tone:

"I'm a humbug and a hypocrite, my lady. I'm grinding Gridley, I am. I grind the face o' the pore and my own axe at the same time."

Lady Selina was able to fill in the lacunæ in this text. She looked very coldly at the young man.

"You dared to say that to my bailiff?"

"It's true, my lady; every word of it."

"Stuff and nonsense! And how dare you hold me responsible for the disease at your neglected farm?"

John spoke deprecatingly.

"Our buildings ought to be destroyed."

Gridley nodded.

"What I've said many a time."

Lady Selina nodded also.

"I'm inclined to agree with that. The buildings were never taken care of."

John exploded.

Digitized by Google

"They were taken too much care of."

Gridley pursued his advantage, saying slyly:

"He thinks, my lady, that he and his father own your property."

"No, I don't," John replied hotly. "All the same——" He broke off abruptly.

"Pray, finish your sentence."

The young man pulled himself together. Voice and hands trembled slightly as he said more quietly:

"Property, my lady, is a trust, a sacred trust, or—or it ought to be."

Lady Selina paused before she answered him, a pause characteristic of her. She boasted, not without reason, that she was approachable, that she listened patiently to what her people might wish to say to her. And rarely indeed did she lose her temper with servants or those whom she held beneath her in station. A faint smile flickered about her lips as she asked quietly:

"Do you seriously accuse me of abusing a sacred trust?"

Gridley broke another silence.

"He says the land belongs to all of us."

"Do you?"

Poor John became desperate, the champion of a lost cause, with his back to the wall, sensible that further speech was futile, quite unable to hold his tongue when challenged.

"I think the land belongs to England, my lady, although a few have been allowed to do what they like with it."

"Allowed?"

"Yes, your ladyship, *allowed*."

"You can go."

John stared at her and went out. Brian opened the door for him and then closed it. Lady Selina spoke to Gridley:

"You will receive a letter from me tomorrow morning. Act upon it promptly."

Digitized by Google

"Very good, my lady."

Mother and son were left alone.

Brian went up to Lady Selina and kissed her, murmuring:

"This has been beastly for you, Mums. I'm most awfully sorry."

"Yes, yes; but what do you think of it?"

"As to that, I think, of course, what you think."

"I call John Exton an anarchist."

"So do I."

"And I won't have anarchists in Upworthy. Send Agatha Farleigh to me."

"Right-o!"

He hurried away, with an air of relief. Lady Selina glanced at her late husband's portrait, frowning and biting her lips. Then she went back to her desk, reopening the Estate ledger and eyeing it grimly. Before Agatha came in, she took up a cut-glass bottle holding crystals of ammonia in eau de Cologne, and inhaled the pungent fumes. She had not admitted to her son that she was stupefied with astonishment.

Agatha Farleigh, however, found her mistress calm as usual.

The girl approached the desk and stood respectfully at attention.

V

She was the niece of that Timothy Farleigh of whom mention has been made, the father of the two little girls who had died of diphtheria. Timothy's brother had worked as head carpenter upon the Upworthy estate, but he had died when Agatha was fifteen. Since then the girl had been educated by Lady Selina, and regarded by her as a deserving object. Agatha had good looks and a quick intelligence, which carry a young woman far upon any road.

Digitized by Google

American slang, so descriptive, might have summed her up as a "live wire." Also, she was discreet, a creature of odd reserves. Lady Selina had come to reckon her as a machine. As a machine Agatha inspired respect. Lady Selina was not addicted to peering beneath the surface of things and people. Her easy habit of mind constrained her to move in what she devoutly called an "appointed" groove. All her servants were well paid, and they remained long in her service because she made them comfortable and disdained espionage. They kept their places in every sense of the word.

Agatha carried a small head upon slender, shapely shoulders. Out of a too pale face glowed a pair of fine grey eyes, set well apart, and indicating breadth of vision. Much to Lady Selina's satisfaction she wore neat skirts and coats, and serviceable boots. She "did" her hair simply; she kept her nails and teeth clean. Hitherto, intercourse with her mistress had been without friction, and for this blessing Lady Selina thanked herself. There might be moments when the lady of the manor caught a glimpse of the real Agatha, disconcerting moments which aroused apprehension. And then Lady Selina wondered vaguely whether it was wise to give village girls "advantages." Agatha had a trick of opening expressive eyes too wide when Lady Selina might be laying down her law upon some parochial matter. Did criticism lurk behind this unabashed gaze? Again, the girl read the papers when she might have been better employed with her needle. On the other hand, Agatha's good memory might be reckoned an asset. She could, and did, put her mistress right upon small matters of fact, tactfully refraining from comment, never obtruding advice. Such qualities carried with them defects. Lady Selina listened to no village tittle-tattle, but she had learnt from Cicely that Agatha Farleigh was a suffragist. When

Digitized by Google

informed of this, the great lady perpetrated a sniff and the austere remark: "I have done much for Agatha, but if she undoes my stitches I cannot hold myself responsible."

"Take down a letter," commanded Lady Selina.

Agatha went to her typist's desk and picked up a stenographer's notebook and a pencil.

"To John Gridley, The Home Farm."

Agatha repeated the words. Lady Selina went on in a tone significantly incisive:

"This letter must be typed, copied, and posted without fail to-night."

"Certainly, my lady."

Lady Selina sat very upright, but quite unaware that she was frowning. Perhaps Agatha divined that she was oppressed by the weight of her responsibilities.

"John Gridley:—After what happened this afternoon my mind is made up—the Extons must go——"

Agatha dropped her notebook. Lady Selina started, much discomposed. Agatha said deprecatingly:

"I beg pardon, my lady."

Lady Selina drew a swift inference.

"I had forgotten. The Extons are friends of yours, eh?"

"Yes, my lady."

"Ah!" She paused for an instant. The habit of years enjoined silence, but she was upset and sensible, also, that she had upset her typist. And for this she was sincerely sorry. It might be worth while to speak confidentially to Agatha, who exercised some influence in the village. Her voice became gentle again, as she leaned back in her chair.

"Do you happen to share John Exton's political views?"

Agatha, taken aback, temporised:

"His political views, my lady?"

"You know what I mean, Agatha. John Exton, to put it

Digitized by Google

mildly, is a Socialist. Not ten minutes ago, in this very room, he aired his views upon property for my benefit. It is true that I asked him to do so. Of course he is at liberty to hold such views. And I am glad that I know where he stands. Now I wish to know where you stand."

Agatha answered respectfully enough:

"I do share some of his views."

Lady Selina made a gesture. Agatha's reserves might exasperate her, but she respected them. After all, if the girl did her work properly, what did her views matter? She sat up briskly.

"Where was I?"

Agatha glanced at her notebook.

"The Extons must go."

"Yes, Ephraim will leave his farm a year from to-morrow. Be perfectly pleasant with the old man, and make him see that I am acting in the interests of a property which I regard as a sacred trust! Underline *sacred trust*, Agatha. Lord Wilverley, if the Extons accept the inevitable in the proper spirit, might at a word from me give Ephraim one of his smaller farms. He is quite incapable of doing justice to a large one."

At this point a strangled sob escaped Agatha. Lady Selina suddenly beheld, in perspective, a weeping community, bewailing the loss of the Extons. Their lamentations filled the air.

"Are you in pain, Agatha?"

"Oh, my lady, of course I am. It's terrible. And that I—I—their friend—should—should——"

She became inarticulate with distress.

"Come, come, you silly girl. Control yourself! Type and copy that letter, and I'll sign it."

"No."

The devastating monosyllable threw Lady Selina off her

Digitized by Google

balance. It outraged her sense of decorum and deportment. Metaphorically, the solid rock of tradition and custom seemed to give way; she positively foundered in quicksands. Gaspingly, she exclaimed:

"What! You refuse——"

Agatha laid down her notebook and pencil.

"Yes, my lady."

Lady Selina rose. She confronted the rebel with dignity; her voice betrayed no emotion whatever. Inwardly, her mind had become kaleidoscopic. She beheld a sort of cubist picture, a futurist nightmare compounded of bits of history, mangled fragments. Marie Antoinette on a tumbril —Charles the Martyr, without his head—Margaret of Anjou in a forest—Nero fiddling when Rome was blazing——

"You must go, too, Agatha. I am sorry to lose your services. I shall be happy to give you an excellent character. But I cannot keep you here. Those who are not with me are against me."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER II

HENRY GRIMSHAW

I

DR. PAWLEY'S house was situate on the village green, opposite to the church and to the left of the inn, The Chandos Arms. It presented a Georgian exterior to the architectural eye, and the front door boasted a pediment which resurrected Queen Anne. Red brick glowed rosily, diffusing an air of hospitality. One might know that the cellarage was excellent, that the larder was well stocked, and that the parlour probably was panelled in oak. Behind the house a walled-in garden sloped upwards to a small temple crowning a mound, which might have served as a tumulus. In this temple, upon fine summer mornings, the doctor breakfasted, consuming leisurely bacon of his own curing and eggs freshly laid. Between herbaceous borders his eyes could wander to his house, where he had lived so pleasantly during thirty years. Often he wondered whether his successor would live as pleasantly. And the conjecture troubled a kindly man, introspective and analytical, distrusting the *laudator temporis acti*, but fully alive to the fact that the England he knew and loved was changing profoundly. He confessed that the eighteenth century was to his taste, as a period of consummate craftsmanship. Slowly he had collected eighteenth century furniture and porcelain and silver. Pope was his favourite poet. Everything in the house was English. Old-fashioned flowers bloomed in his

Digitized by Google

garden and in his heart. And yet, in odd antithesis, he dealt honestly with the present and the future. He had considered the future when the necessity of taking a partner forced itself disagreeably upon his attention. Had he consulted his own inclinations, he might have selected a colleague of middle age, more or less satisfied with existing conditions. Such a colleague would have been accepted by Lady Selina and the villagers as the real right thing in doctors. To seek out a young up-to-date man adumbrated possible disaster to peace of mind. At any rate, it salved a somewhat sensitive conscience to reflect that another might do what he had left undone. At the same time he was whimsically conscious that he had done his best according to lights which glimmered none too brightly when he perused the leading medical journals. Balm descended upon a perturbed spirit when high authorities in his profession flatly contradicted each other in and out of print. He had seen, not without satisfaction, astounding theories spin centrifugally out of sight. Tremendous assumptions had vanished in thin air. If he halted, out of breath and sometimes out of pocket, behind the leaders, he could reflect agreeably upon their divagations, conscious that he had stuck religiously to the well-worn thoroughfare.

Of late, with failing health and energies, he had asked himself whether he was doomed to attend the funeral of his own experience. Such an interment made him shiver, as if an iconoclast were dancing a jig upon his grave. At such times he wondered pathetically what might have been had he taken arms against the lady of the manor after the death of her husband. To work with her, to persuade her where persuasion was possible, to accept resignedly conditions which he could not approve, had proved difficult. Country doctors throughout that part of England were constrained to compromise, although they might detest the

Digitized by Google

word. Parsons were in just the same boat. Goodrich, for example, after a good dinner, might acclaim reforms which he was quite incapable of bringing about. He, too, wandered in a vicious circle of impotent imaginings, walled in by consequence and circumstance. Each man, perhaps, criticised the other, but not too harshly. Both agreed that matters in the village might be worse. Lady Selina spread the voluminous draperies of private charity over insanitary cottages and low wages. Humanly speaking, nothing would change her methods. Wise men made the best of them.

Grimshaw arrived in Upworthy some few days after the midsummer bun-feast. Pawley asked him for a week-end, met him at the station, installed him in a comfortable room, and, after luncheon, accepted with gratitude the young man's suggestion that he should "nose round" by himself during the afternoon. Pawley was taken with his appearance, because vitality exuded from him. He had expected to see signs of overwork, hollow cheeks, a jaded look. And at luncheon he touched lightly upon this. To his surprise, Grimshaw spoke with entire frankness.

"My trouble was mental. I found myself up against vested interests, a hopeless fight. I hostilised authority. And, at heart, I'm an open-air man. I'm fed up with the slums."

"I quite understand."

"Yes; my ease of mind was menaced. And without that, where are you? In a pea-soup fog." He laughed boyishly, and added: "I say, how good your mutton is!"

Presently he took the road without any directions or warnings from Pawley.

II

For a minute or two he stood still, admiring the village green, in the centre of which was a cricket pitch in fairly

Digitized by Google

good order. The church faced him with its low square tower of concrete. Bits of the concrete had fallen off, revealing the bricks beneath. "Not too much money here," thought the young man. His eyes rested upon the cottages, mostly whitewashed, with heavy thatched roofs, very picturesque, and all of them more than a hundred years old. The general effect pleased. Perhaps the best house (barring the doctor's) was The Chandos Arms, with a wide gravel sweep in front of it, and ample stable accommodation. A house of delightful rotundities—bow windows flanking a big hospitable door, dormer windows winking at you out of the thatch, and the thatch itself—a masterpiece of craftsmanship—not cut straight along the eaves but undulating in semicircles of generous diameter. Grimshaw guessed that it had been a prosperous inn during coaching-days, had suffered a decline in custom, and was now blooming in a sort of Indian summer by reason of the increased motor traffic. All the cottages stood back from the road that skirted the green, with small front gardens ablaze with old-fashioned flowers. From where he stood, looking to the left, he could see the trees in the park, and above them the chimneys of the Manor. If the lady of that Manor chose to stand upon her roof she could survey the village, and outwardly at least it must have gladdened her eye. Hard by the church, and beyond it, snuggled the Vicarage. In front of the inn spread a large horse-pond, a treasure-house of fresh-water infusoria. The face of any amateur microscopist would have brightened at the sight of it.

Grimshaw strolled on, crossing the pitch. A wide street led from the green into the grass country beyond, with cottages on both sides of it. No modern buildings offended the artistic sense. Grimshaw passed the post-office, the village store, the baker's, and a cobbler's. He could see no chapel. Nonconformity obviously went without a place of

Digitized by Google

worship in Upworthy. Being Saturday afternoon, many children were playing in front of the cottages. Grimshaw stared at them with professional interest. They appeared to be clean, but not too robust. A few were rickety.

From a blacksmith's forge came the cheery sound of hammer on anvil.

Grimshaw nodded to the smith and bade him "Good day." The smith, nothing loath for a chat, paused in his work, observing critically:

"You be a stranger in these parts?"

"I am," said Grimshaw.

"Ah-h-h! A sight o' folks comes to our village, so pretty and peart it be."

"Not much new building going on."

"Well, no. My lady don't hold wi' improvements. New cottages be needed bad, too."

"You're a bit overcrowded, I take it?"

"That be God A'mighty's truth. I bain't one to complain, but 'tis a fact that Upworthy don't march wi' the times. Never did, I reckons. When the kids grows up they has to muck it like pigs in a sty. But I don't tell all I knows."

Grimshaw passed on. He shot a glance upwards at the windows of bedrooms that held too many children. It was a lovely sunny afternoon, but the upper windows were closed. At the back of each cottage were sties. The county was celebrated for its bacon. He could smell roses; and he could smell pigs. His steps quickened as he left the village behind him.

He was now—as Pawley had informed him—in the heart of the Chandos domain. Cattle browsed placidly in fields enclosed by hedgerows, not hedges, hedgerows beloved by pheasants in October and November. Quite close to the village lay a snipe-bog, which ought to have been drained.

Digitized by Google

From a man at work on the road Grimshaw learnt that the snipe-bog harboured wild-fowl as well as snipe.

" 'Tis as good a bit o' rough shooting as I knows."

"A lot of rabbits, eh?"

"Too many," said the man. "A rare noosance they be."

Grimshaw drew the inference. Here, at any rate, sport reigned supreme. He examined the cows. Unless his experience was at fault, some few were furnishing milk not fit for human consumption. The farmyards into which he stared confirmed this unhappy conclusion. Water lay close to the surface of a clayey soil, and in winter time must have oozed up everywhere. The ditches were not deep enough, and overgrown with rank vegetation. But he saw some handsome colts—prospective hunters—and brood mares. Of high farming there was no evidence whatever. The plough, for some occult reason, seemed to have been banished.

Grimshaw seated himself upon an ancient gate and lit his pipe.

"By their gates ye shall know them," he murmured.

And then——

"Can I stick it?"

Sitting on the gate, his thoughts took a swallow's flight into the past. He had been born in just such a parish, where Peter was robbed to pay Paul, where shift had degenerated into makeshift, where Compromise crowed lustily over Justice and Common Sense. And his father, the parson of the parish, had been a soured man, unable to cope with his environment. Fortunately for Grimshaw an uncle and godfather had sent him to Winchester, where he shone in the playing-fields rather than the class-rooms. After that he had been pitchforked into Medicine, simply because the uncle aforesaid happened to be a fairly prosperous physician.

Digitized by Google

And then his father had died——!

Up to the very day of the funeral—and how dismal it had been!—Henry Grimshaw had taken life very easily. Looking back, analytical of himself and the motives that had governed and misgoverned him, he could remember vividly how keen he had been to distinguish himself at cricket, partly because his father had no stomach for games or sport. Really, he had shirked Latin and Greek out of sheer contrariety, under the lash of a tongue that perhaps unduly exalted classical attainments. And because his sire had been something of an ascetic, he had decided to mortify parental ambitions rather than his own flesh.

In the same odd spirit of contrariety, he had scrapped cricket and football, concentrating all energies upon the study of his profession. The friends of his own age held out the lure of playing for the Gentlemen of England at Lord's. Their insistence exasperated him. After his father's death he found himself in possession of a few thousand pounds and a mother and sister on his hands. His uncle, something of a cynic, said to him:

"Harry, you have good looks and good manners. In my profession these count enormously. When I retire, which I intend to do, you can slide into a capital practice chiefly amongst aged handmaidens of the Lord."

Having good manners, Harry said nothing, but he thought: "I'm bothered if I will." And immediately afterwards, as luck would have it, he was captivated by Babbington-Raikes, the famous gynecologist, who had "enthused" him. Babbington-Raikes fought against diseases of women and children with the ardour and self-sacrifice of a paladin. He was amazing. Babbington-Raikes sent him to a God-forsaken parish in Essex and afterwards to Poplar.

In each place he had learnt much; in each place he had

Digitized by Google

been "downed," like his father before him, by the powers plenipotentiary of vested interests.

And now, apparently, he was "up against them" again.

He returned, after an absence of some hours, in time to dress for dinner. Pawley gave his visitor of his best, and, whilst the trim parlourmaid waited upon them, the talk lingered in the eighteenth century. Grimshaw showed appreciation of the furniture and silver, drawing out his host to describe his adventures as a collector before prices became prohibitive to a man of modest means. An agreeable hour passed swiftly. Then the maid removed the cloth, brought in coffee, and retired. The doctor placed on the well-polished mahogany an antique box well filled with excellent cigars.

"Help yourself," said Pawley.

Grimshaw did so.

"You are amazingly comfortable," he said abruptly. "Your house is a sort of sanctuary. To my notion it's just right. No man could wish to spend the evening of his life in more delightful surroundings."

Pawley nodded. Grimshaw hesitated a moment, glancing at his host. The whimsical face encouraged him to speak frankly.

"I am wondering," he went on, "whether any design lurks behind your charming hospitality?"

Pawley laughed.

"Design? An appeal, you mean, to the flesh?"

"Well, yes. You encourage me to be candid."

"I like that."

"Thanks."

"There is no design behind my hospitality, save the wish to make you heartily welcome here."

"Thanks again. I have had a jolly letter from Brian Chandos."

Digitized by Google

"Ah! His leave was up two days ago. Otherwise I should have asked him here to-night. To-morrow you will meet his mother and sister."

"Another appeal——!"

Pawley eyed him more keenly. Grimshaw strayed down a by-path.

"Tell me about the mother."

"Am I to be biographical?"

"Please."

"She was the daughter of Lord Saltaire, a West Country magnate. He belonged to the *vieille souche*. He owned large estates heavily mortgaged. His daughters were educated at home by a governess who, I imagine, was not too highly paid. Probably she knew enough to cut the girls to the Saltaire pattern. All of them married well. The conclusion has been forced upon me that men like the late Henry Chandos fight shy of cleverness in a wife."

"Am I to infer that Lady Selina is stupid?"

"Heavens—no. What do you call cleverness in a woman?"

Grimshaw considered this. He felt himself to be challenged, and wished to acquit himself adequately. But he had no answer pat to his lip. Indeed, he had never considered the cleverness of women as something to be differentiated from the cleverness of man. But he was quite sure that his own sister might be reckoned clever. And he thought of her as he replied:

"I should expect perception, sympathy, humour, adaptability, and a sound business instinct."

Pawley chuckled.

"I hope you will find all that in your wife, Grimshaw. If you do, you won't focus your affections on Chippendale furniture. To return to my lady—she has perception and sympathy up to a point, and unsound business instincts. I

Digitized by Google

have her word for it that she never drew a cheque till she found herself a widow."

Grimshaw meditated a moment or two before he said tentatively:

"I am rather sorry you mentioned our possible partnership to Lady Selina. From Brian's letter he seems to take it for granted that the thing is cut and dried."

"And it isn't?"

"The pitch—I spent four hours on it—looks bumpy. By the way, who is your Sanitary Inspector?"

Pawley made a grimace.

"Um! An insanitary person, who doesn't inspect."

"Eats out of the hand of Authority."

"An occasional luncheon."

"Dines with the big farmers?"

"You seem to know our little ways."

"I worked in Essex before I went to Poplar."

"I'll admit that you wouldn't be idle here."

"Idle? No. How much time should I have for research work?"

Pawley sighed, too well bred to express his disappointment. He had been a fool to suppose that a young man of Grimshaw's distinction would care to kick against the pricks in an obscure village. Obviously Grimshaw had "nosed about" to some purpose. He had read the writing on the whitewashed walls. He might have wandered into the pretty churchyard and noticed an undue proportion of tiny graves! But to a fighter that might be an incentive, a provocation.

Possibly Grimshaw's sharp ears caught the attenuated sigh. Pawley looked up to find keenly penetrative eyes on his.

"If, Dr. Pawley, *if* I tackle this job, what backing shall I have? Is Lady Selina likely to stand by?"

Digitized by Google

"I—I don't know."

"That means she won't. Brian Chandos used to be a good sort. Will he help or hinder?"

Pawley answered evasively:

"Brian is devoted to his mother. And he's dependent upon her."

"All is said. What about the daughter?"

"You must form your own opinion. She and you together might influence Lady Selina. She loves being loved. Of course she thinks Upworthy a paradise."

At this Grimshaw spoke for the first time with vehemence. It is likely that some instinct warned him that he was being driven, against his judgment, into a false position. Pawley's honesty appealed to him. And he liked him at sight, feeling sorry for him as the victim of autocracy.

"Your Lady Selina is swathed in cotton wool. I behold your Sanitary Inspector bowing down in the house of Chandos. I behold doles instead of decent habitations, thatch and phthisis, whitewash and eyewash."

Pawley took this outburst humorously.

"How gently you young fellows hit."

"I beg your pardon. You know, doctor, I have an objection to those who swagger above me socially, but I hate still more the poor devils cringing below me. The fact that lots of my fellow-countrymen aren't fit to associate with me makes me sick. There! that's off my chest. Let me ask a last question. Who does the dirty work in Upworthy? Who is the son of a gun? I can see your Lady Selina handing out the smiles and ha'pence. Who gives the kicks?"

"Her bailiff. Honest John Gridley—bother him!"

Then they both laughed. Grimshaw promised to talk with the lady of the manor on the morrow. Beyond that he refused to pledge himself. Naturally the talk soon

Digitized by Google

wandered into the professional channel. The elder man listened for the most part, interjecting a few questions, more and more sensible that youth might succeed where he had failed, sensible, also, that having, by the luck of things, found the right man, he was likely to lose him. They parted for the night excellent friends.

III

Next day, at half-past four, Stimson—looking apostolic after Morning Church—ushered them into the drawing-room at the Manor, an immense room seldom used, filled with furniture collected by different generations, some of it good, some of it bad. The ladies of the house didn't appear immediately, and Grimshaw was much amused by the expression on Pawley's face as he glanced sadly at mid-Victorian atrocities, shaking his head dolefully, apparently too overcome for speech. Characteristically, Grimshaw devoted his attention to the full-length portraits, staring at Chandos chins and foreheads. He decided that they must be an obstinate, obdurate race, pleasant to deal with when things ran smoothly, honourable, kindly, and—unquestionably—quality.

Cicely entered first, in evident distress, holding her handkerchief to her eye.

"Oh, Dr. Pawley! How clever of you to come in the very nick of time!"

"What is it, my dear?"

"Some enormous beast—it feels as big as a bluebottle—is committing suicide in my eye. Please save its life and mine—quick!"

"Dear, dear! Where are my glasses?"

As he fumbled for his pince-nez, Grimshaw said promptly:

Digitized by Google

"Allow me, Miss Chandos. Your handkerchief, please."

She smiled, gave him her handkerchief and held up her face. Very deftly Grimshaw extracted a midge, and exhibited it.

"There!"

"Where? Oh, yes. What a tiny thing."

As he flicked it away, returning the handkerchief, with a slight bow, he murmured:

"May all your troubles be as small."

She held out her hand.

"Thanks. You are Dr. Grimshaw?"

"Mr. Grimshaw," he corrected her. She nodded, exclaiming gaily:

"I'm ever so glad to meet Brian's old friend. Now, perhaps, I shall find out what really happened at Winchester."

"Never. We were in the same house."

"And you were a tremendous swell."

"And now a poor G.P."

"G.P.?"

"General Practitioner," Pawley explained. "With a few letters after his name that some Harley Street men haven't got. Now, my dear, I tried to help you the other day. Will you help me?"

"Why, of course." She gazed at him affectionately. "Mother will be down in two jiffs. You caught her napping. Sunday luncheon. How can I help you?"

"I have asked Mr. Grimshaw to become my partner."

"I know. And I think it's perfectly splendid."

"But alas! he's not very keen about it."

Cicely raised her brows. Grimshaw wondered whether she was obstinate, catching a glimpse of the Chandos chin, salient but with a dimple mitigating its contour. He could see that she was surveying him from tip to toe with the well-bred self-possession of her class, evidently mildly

Digitized by Google

astonished that he did not jump eagerly into such a picturesque village as Upworthy. She said simply:

"There's plenty of work for two, isn't there, Dr. Pawley?"

Grimshaw laughed, although he answered seriously.

"That's it. You see, there oughtn't to be."

At this her expression became interrogative. Pawley interposed hastily:

"Mr. Grimshaw thinks that the chronic sickness in Upworthy might be wiped out, if—if he could count upon the active backing of authority."

Cicely assimilated this.

"You mean Mother?"

Grimshaw added quickly:

"And you. Would you work with me on modern lines?"

"Modern lines? Are we modern, Dr. Pawley?"

Pawley glanced at her pretty frock.

"In our frocks, yes."

Cicely accepted the compliment demurely, conscious of the fact that her dressmaker was in the first flight, conscious, too, that Brian's wonderful friend, Old Grimmer, was indifferent, perhaps, to the envelope but not to what it held. His penetrating glances had not escaped notice. She wondered how much her powers of persuasion would count.

"You must talk to Mother, Mr. Grimshaw. She has the welfare of our people next her heart. I hope you will stay here. As for me——"

"Yes?"

"I should like to work with you."

He exclaimed gaily:

"Almost am I tempted. Well, I will talk with Lady Selina, the sooner the better."

"I wish you all luck." She hesitated; a warmer tint suf-

Digitized by Google

fused her cheeks, as she added warningly: "Be—diplomatic."

As the word left her lips, Stimson entered.

"Her ladyship's compliments, Dr. Pawley, and she will join you in a minute." He turned to Cicely: "My lady wishes to see you, Miss Chandos."

Cicely vanished with Stimson. Grimshaw said emphatically:

"What a jolly girl."

Pawley chuckled.

"You've made an impression, my boy. Yes, yes; you'll get on with Cicely like one o'clock."

"And be sacked by Lady Selina at half-past. By Jove! She's a bit of a witch, a fascinator. Where does the charm come from?"

"From her mother."

Grimshaw looked incredulous. He had envisaged the lady of the manor as formidable. He heard Pawley's voice, slightly quavering with apprehension.

"What are you going to say to Authority?"

"Something you have not said. It's quite likely that her belated entrance has been stage-managed. Lady Selina may wish to tackle me alone. And, if so, take my tip—skedaddle before Authority uses you as a Court of Appeal."

Pawley owned up reluctantly:

"You read me. I want to bolt. I'm ashamed to admit that I have funked plain speech all my life. But I'm hanged if I'll funk it any longer."

"Your heart's in the right place," said Grimshaw, almost with affection. He had spent the morning with Pawley, pottering about the pretty, insanitary cottages. And every minute had tightened the bond between them, the bond that links strength with weakness, and age with youth. That

Digitized by Google

bond became tauter as Pawley murmured deprecatingly:

"My heart, I fancy, is not quite in the right place. Anyway, it doesn't do its work too well."

Grimshaw became professional.

"Doesn't it? You must let me go over you to-night. And, if you'll back me and Miss Chandos, I'm hanged if I'll funk being your partner."

"Thank you, my boy, thank you." He added slyly: "I must thank little Cicely, too."

IV

Lady Selina swept in.

At once Grimshaw amended mistaken conceptions of her. He understood swiftly that such a woman might inspire devotion in such a man as Pawley. Graciousness, that priceless asset, shone luminously about her. Conviction that she was exactly what she appeared to be, a lady of quality, must—so Grimshaw decided—impose itself subtly upon everybody coming in contact with her. At a distance one might criticise; in her presence the homage she exacted with such sublime unconsciousness had to be paid—tribute to Cæsar, whether copper or gold. The young man noted the elegance of her gown, the delightful lines of draperies that disdained fashion. He had expected formality, a cold courtesy, the more chilling because good breeding imposed it. But Lady Selina advanced, holding out two small hands.

"I am delighted to meet Old Grimmer."

He said confusedly:

"Who is at your service."

Presently they were seated. Grimshaw found himself close to Lady Selina, so close that he could detect the faint fragrance of orris-root, the only perfume she used.

Digitized by Google

"So you're thinking of a partnership with my dear old friend here?"

Her soft voice, softer than her daughter's, seemed to insinuate itself into his mind, percolating here and there. Pawley answered her:

"Really, we have only just settled it."

"Capital. And how do you like my dear village? Perhaps a foolish question. If you didn't like it, you wouldn't choose to live here."

Grimshaw recovered his self-possession. He spoke as tranquilly as his hostess, but with renewed alertness.

"I spent yesterday afternoon and this morning wandering about Upworthy."

"We are very proud of Upworthy. Our roses——! I have always encouraged my people to grow sweet-smelling flowers."

The young man recalled Cicely's injunction. At the same time he told himself that this first interview was all important. As an honest man, he must make plain his position. To do so without giving offence became a highly stimulating mental exercise.

"Botanically," he replied, "Upworthy is remarkable. From a doctor's point of view, Lady Selina——"

"Yes? I am anxious to hear your verdict. I value nothing so much as candour."

"Thanks. There seems to be a lot of sickness."

Lady Selina sighed. Her comely face assumed a resigned expression, as she murmured devoutly:

"Alas! Poverty and disease are with us always."

"Always, but not everywhere," Grimshaw replied lightly. "Your neighbour, Lord Wilverley, is proud of his exceptionally low death-rate, so I am told."

"Ah. Wilverley lies higher."

"And enjoys a system of drainage."

Digitized by Google

Lady Selina's eyes sparkled. Lord Wilverley happened to be a personal friend, and a magnate, comfortably independent because of London ground rents, able to afford expensive improvements. Also he was a bachelor, on the sunny side of forty. Nobody had guessed that Lady Selina cherished the hope that Wilverley's lord might come to Upworthy for a wife. Already his friendship with Cicely had showed signs (to her eye alone) of a warmer complexion. And yet, behind this rankled a certain jealousy, because Wilverley had been acclaimed a model estate. She turned to Pawley.

"We contend, don't we, Dr. Pawley, that open drainage is best?"

"I have heard you say so, Lady Selina."

"It is best for us doctors," said Grimshaw. "I noticed that most of your cottages are thatched."

"We are very proud of our thatched cottages, aren't we, Dr. Pawley?"

Pawley, with a touch of nervousness, squirming mentally, replied:

"Thatch upon thatch, Lady Selina, is hygienically unsound."

She blinked at him, quite astounded. Grimshaw caught a sub-acid inflection as she riposted swiftly:

"Is it? Why didn't you say so before?" She looked at Grimshaw. "I'm always approachable where the interests of my people are concerned. I have never refused a favour to a tenant without giving him convincing reasons. Have I, Dr. Pawley?"

"Never," affirmed Pawley.

Grimshaw, sorry for Pawley but much amused, and not forgetting honest John Gridley, said smoothly:

"Your land agent ought to have told you, Lady Selina. It was his business."

Digitized by Google

"But I am my own land agent. My bailiff is a capable fellow of the farmer class. I can't afford such an expert as Lord Wilverley employs." She continued gently: "Between ourselves, Mr. Grimshaw, lack of means prevents my doing many desirable things. I ought to rebuild my garage, which is perilously near my house. I ought to put in a local water system. As for my bailiff, he obeys my orders. I don't ask you to work with him. I hope that you will work with me."

She was getting the best of it, and knew it. Grimshaw acknowledged that he was "touched," as fencers put it.

"That is as it should be, Lady Selina. I think I can promise you a cleaner bill of health if—if we work together."

Unconsciously, he assumed a graver tone. Lady Selina eyed him pensively. She told herself that she liked him. He was certainly a gentleman, and as certainly a man of intelligence and capacity. A devastating thought flooded her mind. Was he too attractive? Compared with Lord Wilverley, for instance. Cicely had spoken of Old Grimmer with enthusiasm. And, as Brian's friend, as the partner of Pawley, her house must be open to him. Young girls were susceptible, and it was impossible to play watch-dog in this go-as-you-please twentieth century. Then, confident in her own powers, she swept what she held to be an absurd possibility out of her mind. Cicely was a Chandos. Meanwhile, she must "place" this up-to-date young fellow more accurately. She continued sweetly:

"Have you any definite plan in your mind which might bring about this clean bill of health?" He bowed. "What is it?"

"My plan would involve the expenditure of time——"

"I have never grudged that."

"And—money."

Slightly taken aback, she repeated the word:

Digitized by Google

"Money? Much money?"

"Probably some thousands of pounds."

Lady Selina was horrified, throwing up her shapely hands in protest. Habitually, she thought in pence, not in pounds. Her voice became sharp.

"Some *thousands* of pounds——! What do you say to this amazing statement, Dr. Pawley?"

Pawley, alive to a derisive gleam in Grimshaw's eyes, replied hastily:

"Nothing. Absolutely nothing."

Lady Selina became more and more perturbed. Grimshaw saw that he had made an impression. It might be discreet to retire, leaving his suggestions to soak in.

"My plan may be unworkable, Lady Selina."

"But it is. I can tell you, in confidence, that my dear husband left this estate to me clear of all debt. I can't borrow money. He would turn in his grave if I did. *Thousands of pounds——!*"

Stimson saved an unendurable situation by appearing with the tea-things. Pawley rose. Lady Selina recovered her graciousness.

"You must stay to tea. I insist."

Cicely came back, carrying a bunch of roses, fresh from the garden.

"Is it settled?" she asked gaily. "Do you join us?"

Grimshaw smiled back at her.

"Yes; it is settled, Miss Chandos."

"I'm ever so glad."

V

The partners walked home together across the park, which was not of large extent and held no deer. Henry Chandos had put down the deer. Sheep browsed placidly upon the rich grasses. Bordering the park was a shrubbery of

Digitized by Google

rhododendrons, and through this meandered a path which ended at a fine wrought-iron gate opening upon the village green. As they passed through the rhododendrons, Grimshaw noticed that they had reverted to type—the familiar *Ponticum*.

"Lady Selina has let things rip," he remarked.

"There isn't too much money, as perhaps you have guessed."

"But she told us that the estate was clear of debt."

"To keep it so is her mission in life. Well, what did you think of her?"

"Wonderful! There is no other adjective. I can understand that there has been a conspiracy of silence to 'spare' her. Forgive me for saying that I am sure you are the chief conspirator."

"I admit it. Goodrich has a second place. To disturb her admirable peace of mind seemed to us—sacrilege. You upset her, but she cottoned to you."

"I rattled her," said Grimshaw. "What the effect will be I can't predict. Obviously, I'm in for a fight. And the odds are against me, because her son is devoted to her. I am sure that in his place I should feel as he does. But Miss Chandos——!"

"All women are unknown quantities."

"To old bachelors."

Pawley rubbed his bony fingers together.

"To all of us and to themselves. I make no prognosis about Cicely. The mother can be diagnosed with greater confidence. Henry Chandos ran this place prehistorically. Lady Selina strolls placidly in his ruts. If I can read the barometer, now apparently at 'Set Stormy,' we are likely to witness confounding changes."

"Here?"

"Everywhere. A universal upheaval."

Digitized by Google

"But—good heavens!—you don't think war is coming?"

"I am quite sure of it. A fight between Democracy and Autocracy."

"England will keep out of it."

"She can't."

They argued without acerbity, as thousands argued during those early days of July, 1914. But it never occurred to either that war, if it did come, would affect them personally. Soldiers and sailors would do their duty; civilians would carry on much as usual. No modern war could last very long. Finally, as they neared home, Grimshaw said with a laugh:

"Whatever happens, I can't see your Autocrat 'downed.'"

"It would be a pathetic spectacle," observed Pawley. "I have the kindliest feelings toward her, but I detest her system."

"You blame Gridley."

"Ah! He's the source of most of the mischief. And she doesn't know it. I hope with all my heart that you will 'down' him."

"He may 'down' me," said Grimshaw, thinking of Essex experiences, where his poorer patients had been grievously maltreated by just such another.

"I back you, my boy." Pawley pressed a strong arm reassuringly.

VI

Alone with her daughter, Lady Selina, so to speak, uncorked herself. Suppressed feeling bubbled forth in sparkling ebullition. Cicely secretly felt rather flattered. As a rule, her mother withheld confidence concerned with money. Cicely, for example, had no idea of what the family income might be. It seemed to be adequate without pinching. She

Digitized by Google

had been promised a season in London; she was given plenty of frocks; her hunter had cost a hundred and fifty pounds; Brian never complained of his allowance. But, unlike her mother, Cicely had learnt at school elementary business principles. She knew girls of her own age who paid cash for their clothes, and passed anxious hours over the problems of adjusting means and ends. She had discovered that it was bad business to buy cheap shoes and underclothing. And debt was a synonym for misery and humiliation.

Accordingly, she agreed with her mother that Mr. Grimshaw's price for a clean bill of health was preposterous.

"I like the young man, my dear; I am glad to entertain him but not his ideas. It's so easy to be lavish with other people's money. Thousands of pounds——!"

She repeated this intermittently, as if repetition might exorcise an unholy suggestion.

"What does Mr. Grimshaw want to do?" asked the girl.

"Heaven knows! A system of drainage, waterworks, the rebuilding of cottages."

"What Lord Wilverley has done."

"A very rich man, child. And the best of good fellows—a very sincere friend of yours, by the way."

"Is he?"

Then meeting the maternal eye, the girl blushed a little, much to Lady Selina's satisfaction. Wisely she abandoned further soundings. Arthur Wilverley could be trusted to do his own courting. So her thought sped back to Grimshaw. Already she had adopted a policy. Grimshaw had to be reckoned with. To treat him coldly, to keep him at a distance, simply meant a disturbance of the peace. If she were really "nice" to him, he would be disarmed. In small things he should have a free hand. Ultimately he

Digitized by Google

would work with her, along her lines, without friction. So she said lightly:

"I must ask Mr. Grimshaw to dinner. I wonder whether he belongs to the Grimthorpe Grimshaws."

"Does it matter?"

Lady Selina smiled tolerantly. This was one of the less happy consequences of sending a girl to school. She said superbly:

"A Chandos ought to be able to answer that question."

Cicely remained silent. Her great friend at school had been Arabella Tiddle, the daughter of the millionaire pill-manufacturer. Lady Tiddle—so Lady Selina had been credibly informed—once worked in a shoe factory. Sometimes Lady Selina wondered what it felt like to be a Tiddle. She shied at the name, as Cicely was well aware. Nevertheless, Arabella had been invited to the Manor, where she comported herself triumphantly. A small string of beautiful pearls was graciously approved by Arabella's hostess; whereupon the girl said ingenuously: "So very appropriate, aren't they?" Lady Selina, not sure of this, asked pleasantly: "Why, my dear?" Arabella replied with a laugh: "They are just like Daddy's pills. Of course you know that he advertises them as 'Tiddle's Pearls.'" Lady Selina didn't know this, but she smiled amiably, and Arabella continued: "Mummy has ropes of them. *Tiddle's Priceless Pearls!* Funny, isn't it?" Lady Selina smiled again; a different adjective occurred to her.

Cicely's silence slightly exasperated her. Confidence ought to beget confidence. Now that she was beginning to treat her daughter as "grown up," surely she might expect more response. Had Cicely learnt to hold her tongue at school? The right selection of a school had worried Lady Selina not a little. Dr. Pawley shared her anxieties. At thirteen Cicely became rather anæmic, almost scraggy!

Digitized by Google

Bracing air was prescribed; reinvigorating games; the stimulus of competition in work and play. After studying innumerable prospectuses, Lady Selina chose a big school on the South Coast, a sort of Eton in petticoats. And there the child had grown into a strong young woman. But, undoubtedly, she had lost something vaguely described by Lady Selina as "bloom." Attrition with girls without grandfathers had rubbed it off. Miss Tiddle had no "bloom" except upon her cheeks. The political tendencies of the school were lamentably democratic.

She continued blandly, ignoring Cicely's silence, taking for granted that it meant nothing:

"I daresay Mr. Grimshaw plays tennis."

"Fancy your not knowing——!"

"What?"

"He's top hole at games. After leaving Winchester he played cricket for his county. I'd bet sixpence that he plays tennis better than anyone about here. He's an athlete all over. He won't play pat-ball with me. No such luck!"

Lady Selina, after a penetrating glance at her daughter's face, thought to herself: "I shall see that he doesn't." Then she kissed Cicely and laughed.

"We must be decently civil, my dear. That's all."

With that she went her way, not without misgivings. Why was it easier for her to understand her son rather than her daughter? Brian, she felt sure, would see eye to eye with his mother—a Chandos every inch of him. But Cicely baffled her. Had she made a hero of this young surgeon? Did she reckon breeding of no account? Still, her blush at mention of Wilverley's name was reassuring. Later, at Evensong, during a dull sermon, she beguiled herself happily with a vision of Cicely and Wilverley kneeling on the chancel steps, with the lawn sleeves of a bishop raised above them in solemn benediction. She prayed fer-

Digitized by Google

vently that it might be so. And Cicely, at the same moment, sitting demurely by her august mother, was wondering what sort of a woman Henry Grimshaw would marry. Did his fancy prefer blondes to brunettes? Was he engaged already? What deft fingers he had. Hardly had she felt the touch of them on her lower eyelid. But she had thrilled. The fact provoked her. She decided finally that he was the nicest young man she had ever met.

Perhaps it was as well for Lady Selina's admirable peace of mind, not to mention her robust Anglican piety and faith in what was established, that she could not read Cicely as she read her son.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER III

CUPID SPEEDS HIS SHAFTS

I

GRIMSHAW went back to London to pack up his traps, and on the following Tuesday dined with his maternal uncle, Sir Dion Titherage, at the Parthenon. Sir Dion, lately raised to the dignity of knighthood, with an excellent practice in Belgravia, chiefly amongst elderly ladies, had paid—as has been said—for his nephew's schooling, and regarded the young man with a paternal eye. Long ago Sir Dion had led to the altar of St. Paul's, Knightsbridge, one of his well-to-do patients, much older than himself. There had been no children. Lady Titherage was now a confirmed hypochondriac, but likely to make old bones, thanks to the ministering care and skill of that optimist, her husband.

A small table at the farther end of the immense dining-room had been reserved for Sir Dion and his guest. Through a big window a glimpse could be obtained of lawn and trees, and, beyond, the façade of a famous terrace. Dining at such a table, a member of the learned professions could reflect pleasantly upon the fact that the privileged occupiers of that terrace must each possess, on a reasonable average, at least twenty thousand a year. But few members of the Parthenon dined at their club. Here and there, oases in the desert, were bishops, who contented

Digitized by Google

themselves with simple fare. Sir Dion pointed out these pillars of the Establishment, a Royal Academician, a hanging judge, an eminent architect, and the club bore, who dined at the Parthenon nearly every night, and kept sensitive and retiring members at bay. Sir Dion said, with a chuckle:

"I don't dare dine here without a guest, my boy; and even then he yaps at me—he yaps at me. Really, it's a sad breach of our unwritten rules. This is recognised as a Temple of Silence and Snooze. Conversation is very properly barred."

Grimshaw laughed. His uncle amused him. Sir Dion continued:

"We only wake up at the club elections in the drawing-room. A lot of pilling goes on. I asked one old boy to pill a particularly aggressive candidate, and he said curtly: 'Why?' I replied, 'Because he's a cantankerous, unclubbable ass.' The old boy scowled at me and said savagely: 'I'm a cantankerous, unclubbable ass, and I shall vote for him.' *And he did!*"

A carefully chosen dinner was provided, admirably cooked. Sir Dion, after the ice, took a Corona de Corona cigar from his ample case, and sent it to the chef with his compliments and thanks. And he exchanged a joke with the steward when he settled his bill before leaving the dining-room.

Not till he had finished his coffee did Sir Dion speak seriously.

"So it's the parish pump for you, eh?"

"With the pump out of order."

Sir Dion nodded. Then he said, portentously for him:

"You are your father's son. He tilted against windmills all his life, poor dear fellow! As a schoolmaster he would have climbed high and ended as a bishop. I used to offer him sound advice, although, to do him justice, he never

Digitized by Google

asked for it or took it. Now I am tempted to say a word or two to you."

"Thank you, Uncle."

"From what you tell me you seem to like trouble. I don't. That, of course, is the essential difference between us. However, your partner, Pawley, seems to have a good practice amongst country people. And, when he retires, you ought to earn a decent income."

"I hope so."

"A good country practice is not to be sneezed at, but you will sneeze at it, I'm afraid. I see you trying to drain that snipe-bog you mention instead of keeping step on the high-road with Pawley."

"I shall fight for more sanitary conditions."

"Stripped already, I see. And up against a lady of quality! Now for my two words: 'Go slow!' Women never surrender their opinions to men they dislike. It's a pity you can't marry her and reach your objectives that way. What? Fifty-five! And a marriageable daughter! Another tip. Don't make up to the daughter. Unless——" He chuckled, lighting a fresh cigar.

"Unless——?"

"I remember some transpontine story of a stout fellow like you who courted a rich widow with a pretty daughter. The rich widow accused the stout fellow of loving her money-bags more than herself. He made a very creditable bluff. Told her to deed every dollar she possessed to her daughter. And, begad! she called the bluff and did so. Then he bolted with the daughter!"

The evening ended where it began—in laughter.

On the steps of the Parthenon, when the nephew thanked the uncle for his entertainment, Sir Dion shook his hand very heartily.

"I wish you luck, my boy. If you get any of that rough

Digitized by Google

shooting, send me a bird. I like the flavour of a wild pheasant. God bless you!"

Grimshaw, as he went back to his modest diggings, reflected that Sir Dion's ways were not his, and yet the old fellow brimmed over with kindness, and assuredly attained his objectives.

II

By the middle of July he was installed in rooms in Upworthy under the fostering care of the Rockrams, two old servants from the Manor. Tom Rockram had been Stimson's predecessor, before the old Squire died, and his wife had soared from scullery-maid to cook in the same establishment. Their cottage faced the village green, and stood in its own garden. Each spring and summer the Rockrams took in boarders, but, at a hint from Dr. Pawley, they were glad to get a permanent "gentleman." Grimshaw was given a good bedroom and sitting-room, and he had the use of Pawley's dispensary.

Upon the faces of the two old servants were inscribed, with full quarterings, the Chandos arms. Whatever a Chandos did was just right. Brian, of course, in the judgment of Mrs. Rockram, was the handsomest hussar in the kingdom; Tom Rockram spoke with even greater enthusiasm of Cicely as the sweetest young lady in the world. Too sugary, perhaps, these descriptions, from a hypercritical point of view, but indicating loyalty and gratitude, qualities rare indeed in modern servants. Grimshaw found himself valeted to perfection, and looked forward to excellently cooked meals, a quite novel experience. The cosiness of it all was in delightful contrast to domestic conditions in Poplar. He wondered whether he would grow fat, like the weed on Lethe's wharf, and slowly rot at ease. For the first time in his life he began to spell comfort with a capital

Digitized by Google

"C." To Pawley and Lady Selina he said emphatically: "I never had such a billet." To himself, he thought, with amused apprehension: "Will this cosseting get a stranglehold on me?" And if it did, what of it? Good men and true toiled and moiled, struggling on against adverse winds and currents, to achieve just such snug anchorage.

Pawley introduced him to some of the local magnates, who smiled graciously upon an old Wykhamist. Each day it became more certain to the young man that a prosperous future was his if he played the cards already in his hand. Sir Dion had been right. A sound country practice was not to be sneezed at. And the premium paid to Pawley had been negligible. In fine, he was treading a broad highway, walking briskly towards fortune, if not fame. Pawley suggested that on occasion he might ride.

"Would your means justify keeping a horse?" he asked.

"Do you mean a hunter? The doctor in boots?"

"Well, yes. A cavalier, you know, challenges attention. One day a week in the season might be worth while from every point of view."

Grimshaw laughed.

"And how about my research work?"

"As to that——! You see, my dear fellow, I hesitate to advise you. The horse is a suggestion, nothing more. Long ago I gave up hunting. I've regretted it. As for research work, doesn't it exact too undivided energies? I had to scrap my microscope before I put down my hunter. Think it over."

Grimshaw nodded. But he hardly dared to confess to himself how keen he was to take up again open-air sports and pastimes. His first appearance on the village green, as a cricketer, had been acclaimed by all Upworthy. Lady Selina said solemnly: "Perhaps we shall beat Wilverley next year."

Digitized by Google

Playing cricket, he met John Exton, and exchanged some talk with him. In Poplar it was impossible to throw a stone without hitting young men of John's kidney. They, however, threw the stones in Poplar quite regardless of whom they might hit. Grimshaw knew that the Extons were under notice to quit the old homestead; and he knew also that Lady Selina had persuaded Lord Wilverley to entrust a small farm to Ephraim. This had soaped the ways by which the Extons slid from one parish into another. John was very bitter about it.

"We've never had a dog's chance," he told Grimshaw. "I don't say, sir, that Father was wise to buy thoroughbred stock when he hadn't proper buildings to house 'em in, but the old Squire egged him on to do it. Things were a sight better in his time, because he kept the whip-hand of Gridley. Now, Gridley does pretty much as he pleases, and my lady don't know what goes on behind her back. Gridley sees to it that she ain't bothered."

"You're up against a system," said Grimshaw. "It's no use blaming individuals."

"I blame my lady," John replied doggedly.

He was not the only one in Upworthy who held that individual responsible.

Nick Farleigh, the softy, did odd jobs for Tom Rockram, pumping water, fetching and carrying like a retriever, blacking boots, and feeding poultry. In common with many children of undeveloped minds, he had strange gifts, fashioning queer objects out of unconsidered trifles. Grimshaw won his devotion by showing him how to make a Chinese junk out of a square of newspaper.

Nick said gratefully:

"I bain't afeard of 'ee, zur."

"Why should you be afraid of anybody, my boy?"

Nick became confidential.

Digitized by Google

"I be afeard o' nothink 'cept they broody hens o' Mrs. Rockram's. You know I be soft, zur, don't 'ee?"

"Nonsense! We shall make a man of you yet, Nick."

Nick considered this, with his head on one side. Then he whispered:

"I be soft along o' my lady."

Grimshaw asked Pawley to explain. With some reductance, Pawley repeated what he had said to Cicely, with these additions:

"Nick's mother, just before he was born, lost her two little girls of diphtheria. The boy was born wanting. Timothy Farleigh has never got over it. Lady Selina had just buried the Squire. In your opinion, Grimshaw, could mental suffering so affect and afflict an unborn child?"

"It might," Grimshaw replied.

"Ever since Timothy Farleigh has smouldered with resentment."

Grimshaw nodded. He had heard about Agatha Farleigh from John Exton. Agatha was now working in London, earning good wages, but Timothy, at the ale-house, accused Lady Selina of hounding a clever girl out of her village.

"I smell foul weather," said Grimshaw.

Within a week the Great War had broken out.

Upworthy remained perfectly calm.

Brian Chandos came home on short leave. His regiment would be one of the first to go. He smoked many pipes with Grimshaw, picking up the old friendship easily, just where he had left it, apparently the same ingenuous youth whom Grimshaw remembered at Winchester. Really a Pacific of essential differences rolled between them, differences of experience. Grimshaw listened to Brian on the coming "show." As a soldier he seemed to know something about his "job." As the prospective heir to a fine property his

Digitized by Google

ignorance was immeasurable. He viewed it, as it were, from the wrong end of the telescope. What appeared big to him—the future of foxhunting, for instance, game-preserving, and polo—was negligible to Grimshaw in comparison with decent housing and a better wage for land-workers. Brian cut him short when, tentatively, such reforms were barely outlined:

"Cottages in the rural districts don't pay, never did. We can't raise wages without hostilising the farmers—and I ask you, where are we if we do that?" Again and again he silenced argument in Grimshaw by repeating filially: "Mother knows; you talk to her; she'd do anything in reason, anything."

And at the first dinner at the Manor, rather to Grimshaw's dismay, Brian said, in a loud voice, as if it were a good joke: "I say, Mums, Old Grimmer is a bit of a Rad. You must take him in hand. He's an out-and-out reformer."

Cicely didn't improve matters by adding:

"And a jolly good thing too. Dr. Pawley says we are antediluvians."

Pawley was not present, having departed on his holiday. Lady Selina looked down her nose.

"Are you quite sure Dr. Pawley said that, my dear?"

"Absolutely," Cicely replied. "We are only modern in our frocks; and that doesn't apply to you, Mums."

Unfortunately for Grimshaw, Lord Wilverley happened to be present. He, at any rate, was recognised outside of his own county as an enlightened and experienced agriculturist. And being a kindly man, secure in a great position, he came to Grimshaw's rescue. Lady Selina found herself listening to the opinions of a magnate, who might be a son-in-law. And the odds against such a desirable match diminished when she saw Cicely eagerly assimilating what Wilverley

Digitized by Google

said. And, of course, Wilverley being Wilverley, could say what he pleased. Grimshaw realised, with humorous dismay, that he was cast for the part of scapegoat. On his head would fall the hardly-concealed resentment of the lady of the manor.

After dinner matters became worse. Brian wanted to talk to Wilverley about horse-breeding. Lady Selina took up her embroidery. Cicely made herself agreeable to Grimshaw, instead of improving the shining hour with the best *parti* in the neighbourhood. And Grimshaw, grateful to a charming girl, exerted himself to please and entertain. It seemed to be predestined that he would gain in favour with the daughter what he might lose with the mother. And who will blame him if he strove to distinguish himself with the former after some extinguishment at the hands of the latter? He could talk much better than Wilverley, and he knew it. Wilverley spoke didactically. Grimshaw had a more graceful seat astride his hobby-horse. He excelled in description, transporting Cicely to Essex and Poplar, into the deep clay ruts of the one and the mean streets of the other. Cicely could not help contrasting the two men, the fidgety irritability of Wilverley with the easy good-humour of Grimshaw, who laughed at his own failures. Wilverley grew red and heated in argument; Grimshaw became pale and cool.

Nevertheless, there was a curious incandescence about him. Under ordinary atmospheric pressure he might seem dull, sinking into odd silences and introspections, but when a right vacuum was obtained, such a vacuum as a charming young lady might present, an inquiring mind, let us say, empty of essential facts, he glowed, giving out heat and light, not a blazing, eye-blinking glare, but something softly and steadily illuminating.

"I've had some humiliating experiences, Miss Chandos.

Digitized by Google

Till you live and work amongst the very poor, you can't realise how difficult it is to understand them, and how much more difficult it is for them to understand us. Millions have never seen a woman like you. They live like animals; they are animals; and, of course, that's our fault."

"Our fault?" she gasped. But she was the more interested because he had made his theme personal.

"Oh, yes; we don't give enough; and now, because of that, they, poor things, at the mercy of any glib, red-rag revolutionary, want to take too much. The privileged classes have never really exercised their greatest privilege."

"And what is that, Mr. Grimshaw?" she asked in a low voice.

"Why, helping others to help themselves. Ordinary charity only hinders. Wage earners demand more than *panem et circenses.*"

"I don't know what that means."

"Bread and 'movies.' They don't like dry bread; and the 'movies' serve to fill them with envy for all they haven't got." Then, in a different tone, with a queer astringent cynicism, he added: "I didn't exercise my privileges."

"I'm sure you did," she affirmed with conviction.

"No—I bolted. I couldn't stick it. My own impotence maddened me. Perhaps——" His voice died away. He began again: "It's not what we do that counts, but the way we do it. Talking to them is waste of time. Words! Words! How one hates them after a time! I've waded through all the dreary stuff that's written about the poor. Most of it makes one sick. I don't believe that conditions can be bettered anywhere by talk, not even when the talk is buried in the Statute Book. Something more is needed. Some—some tremendous discipline that will change the point of view of the classes and the masses so that they can see each other in truer perspective. Do the waves wonder why they

Digitized by Google

batter themselves into spray against the rocks? But there is attrition all the time. Tremendous forces win in the end."

"Do you mean that we are the rocks?"

"We stand on the rocks, blandly looking at the waves, impressed by their fury, but not attempting to control it and use it. Perhaps the biggest rock on which we stand is class loyalty. I'm sure your mother prides herself on that."

"Of course she does."

"Have you ever tried to analyse class loyalty?"

"No."

"Self-preservation is behind and beneath it. At core lies a selfish, primitive instinct—to hold on tight to what we have regardless of how we came by it. Above this is a reticulation, a spider's web, of inherited prejudices and predilections, so tangled up that one despairs of untangling them. On the surface, like a soft moss, love of ease spreads itself. I feel that here in all my bones. I try to fight against it. The lure of comfort——! What a bait——! Satan's tit-bit——!"

His vehemence, the more insistent because he spoke so quietly, almost in a whisper, made a profound impression. She had never heard any man talk like this. The abysmal conviction in his tone amazed her. Wilverley, as she knew, preached in and out of season a doctrine of reconstruction and reform. But he did it with the air of a man who was grinding his own axe, putting a finer edge upon a weapon which he intended to use to better his own large fortune. He never lost sight of the fact that what he did on his domains *paid,* brought grist to his mill. All his excellent schemes for housing labourers comfortably, for paying them a higher wage, for nourishing them adequately, for developing in them capacities and potentialities, were really

Digitized by Google

inspired by the force which had raised his father from the lower middle class to the nobility. Obviously, Grimshaw was actuated by no such essentially selfish motive. He thought of others before himself; he seemed to behold a travailing world with the detachment of a physician pledged, if need be, to sacrifice his own comfort and advancement in the practice of his hard profession. She said hesitatingly, groping her way towards his conclusions:

"Surely, Mr. Grimshaw, there is something finer than that in what you call class loyalty?"

"All loyalty is fine," he replied, "but there can be no monopoly of it. Do you think that the unprivileged classes do not feel it in a blind sort of way? Of course they do. And that loyalty is a driving power which the more unscrupulous of their mis-leaders are harnessing to their own ambitions. Class loyalty, wherever you find it, is undiluted Prussianism."

She laughed a little.

"Is my mother a Prussian?" she asked mischievously.

"Your mother," he replied less tensely, with a glance at that lady as she bent over her embroidery, "is—is——"

"Covered with soft moss?" she suggested.

"We are all covered with moss, Miss Chandos. And, I suppose, the moss must be raked off before we can see with clear vision."

"You are raking some of it off me. I told you I wanted to work with you. I do—more than ever, but you mustn't rake at Mother. Perhaps you noticed that Lord Wilverley tried raking at dinner." He nodded. "Oh, you did. Of course, she has to stand it from him."

"Lord Wilverley, I noticed, made an impression on you."

His eyes met hers. She noticed a twinkle in them. All tension had gone from his pleasant voice.

Digitized by Google

"I like what he does more than I like what he says. He tries to spur people to his ideas. You can't spur Mother."

"No."

"I am glad that you are more—a—persuasive in your methods."

"Am I?"

She smiled, nodding her head. He wondered whether there was a tincture of the coquette in her. In criticising Wilverley was she trying to hide her real feelings for him? He had not answered the question when Wilverley left Brian and approached the pair on the sofa. Grimshaw made sure he wanted to talk to Cicely, and rose at once. To his surprise, Wilverley said without any condescension:

"I'm looking forward to making your better acquaintance, Mr. Grimshaw. If you have no other engagement, will you dine and sleep at the Court some day that suits you next week?"

"With great pleasure."

A day was named, and shortly afterwards Wilverley took his leave. Grimshaw left the Manor a few minutes later. Alone with her children, Lady Selina said with a sigh:

"Dear me! It wasn't a very pleasant dinner, was it?"

"I enjoyed myself," said Cicely.

"Yes, b'Jove! We saw that, didn't we, Mums? And the little baggage sided against us. But we held our own—we held our own."

Lady Selina smiled maternally, catching an echo of Brian's father. Cicely replied sharply:

"If you hold on too tight to what you think is your own, you may lose it, if democracy wins this war."

"Hark to her!" exclaimed Brian. "What a cry!"

Cicely, however, saw the expediency of running mute.

Digitized by Google

She kissed her mother and brother and went to bed. Lady Selina turned troubled eyes upon her son.

"Have I made a mistake in being civil to this friend of yours, Brian?"

Brian hastened to reassure her: Old Grimmer was a thundering good sort. And a mighty clever fellow, not likely to quarrel with his bread-and-butter. Civility would tie him to his mother's apron-strings. Nothing like it. Ask him to shoot! Introduce him to all the swells! But keep an eye peeled on Cis. Modern girls kicked over the traces. Arthur Wilverley meant business. Any fool could see that. Grimshaw was a gentleman. He wouldn't attempt to poach in another fellow's preserves. All the same, make him feel the weight of obligation. Be civil, be kind—keep it up!

Lady Selina was not quite comforted.

"Your Old Grimmer is very attractive. And, to-night, it seemed to me that poor dear Arthur was rather eclipsed. Sometimes, Brian, I feel discouraged, and then I want support. I can't argue with Arthur, for instance. He overwhelms me with words—words. And then, like your father, I say nothing. But it comforts me greatly to feel that you think as I do, that the old ways suffice you."

"Ra-ther!"

"You are my dear son."

She held his hand, gently caressing it, gazing at him with tears in her eyes, which he pretended not to see. Thousands of mothers throughout the land were indulging in these furtive caresses, saying little because they feared to say too much. Thousands of sons respected such pathetic silences.

Before Grimshaw's brief visit to Wilverley Court, an incident took place, trivial in itself, but fraught with far-reaching consequences. The faithful Mrs. Rockram fell ill, taking to her bed with a neglected cold likely to develop into

Digitized by Google

pleurisy and pneumonia. Grimshaw, however, came to the rescue and—as Mrs. Rockram affirms to this day—saved her life. For twenty-four hours grave issues impended above a high temperature and severe pain. Cicely was in and out of the cottage half a dozen times, bringing what was required from the Manor kitchen, and ministering eagerly to an old friend. Lady Selina, wisely or otherwisely, made no protest. She must have known that two highly-strung young people would be thrown together. But, at the moment, every young woman in the kingdom had become a potential nurse. And also, as luck would have it, no professional nurse could take Cicely's place. And Mrs. Rockram had served the Chandos family for five-and-twenty years . . . !

Man and maid, therefore, beheld each other with clear vision under the happiest conditions of a temporary and unconventional intimacy. They glided into comradeship, not recking where it might carry them. The current bore them out of a prosaic present into a land of dreams, the shadowy future where we fondly believe that we shall be more abundantly blessed. Both were unaware of the interest and curiosity that each kindled in the other, because, with all sincerity, they were engrossed in a common task which exacted unceasing vigilance. Even Grimshaw, with his habit of introspection and analysis, would have ridiculed the suggestion of sentimental attraction between himself and Cicely. He knew better than his amateur nurse how acute was the condition of his patient, a stout, lymphatic woman, with but slight powers of resistance to disease. And Cicely, for her part, could have sworn truthfully that the mere sight of Grimshaw's tense face, the mere sound of his incisive voice, had frightened her out of her wits, constraining her to uncompromising obedience and attention. For the first time she saw a man fighting desperately to save the life

Digitized by Google

of another. The only thing that seemed to matter was to help him to the best of her ability.

Had she contented herself with that, no consequences would have ensued. But she divined instantly that Grimshaw, unsparing of himself, needed her special attention. Dr. Pawley's cook was taking a holiday like her master. The food at The Chandos Arms was primitive. And it did not occur to Lady Selina to ask Grimshaw to stay at the Manor. Brian had rejoined his regiment. Cicely rose triumphantly to a small emergency. Grimshaw found cold ham on his sideboard, some delicious sandwiches and hot soup. He gobbled these up without hazarding any conjecture as to whence they came. Tom Rockram, however, enlightened him. The honest fellow had some of the ham for his own dinner.

"You can thank my young lady," he told him.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Grimshaw, "I haven't."

His thanks, perhaps, were heartier because belated.

The crisis passed swiftly; and Grimshaw had other patients. But Cicely stuck to her post till Mrs. Rockram was pronounced well able to fend for herself. By that time Cupid had sped his shafts. The victims, as yet, felt no smart, but each magnified the other, disdaining measurements. Mont Blanc and Monte Rosa, twin peaks, soaring into the blue!

The intimacy ended as suddenly as it had begun. Grimshaw took leave of his comrade with unaffected regret and slightly awkward apologies.

"I'm afraid I ordered you about, Miss Chandos."

"Oh, you did. But I liked that. *Obedience is necessary to success.* That line is engraved on my heart. I used to write it out thousands of times when I first went to school."

"Did you? There's a touch of the rebel in you."

"Yes; there is. I used to spell 'necessary' with one 's' on

Digitized by Google

purpose to annoy the mistress who set the pun. Such a silly pun too. Vain repetitions!"

"Exasperating everywhere."

"Particularly in church, from the mouth of dear old Goody."

"You *are* a rebel. And so am I."

"Of course I know that." Her eyes met his frankly, with an odd challenge. Against his discreeter judgment he felt impelled to take up that challenge.

"Do you still want to work with a rebel?"

She eyed him with self-possession, faintly smiling. But she was thinking how difficult it would be to describe him adequately in a letter to Miss Arabella Tiddle. By now she was able to view him in perspective, ripening to full maturity. Immense possibilities were indicated, she decided. Would he expand into a splendid *somebody?* Would he "furnish up"?—to use Brian's favourite expression about a four-year-old. Dr. Pawley had said of him: "He rings true," with an allusion to the eighteenth-century wine-glasses which he collected. And, after that happy comparison, she had never heard Grimshaw speak without noting the lingering resonance of his tones. Head and body were admirably proportioned, rich in line and contour, but not aggressively so. The careless eye would wander past him. He was, admittedly, too thin, too pale, to please the ordinary bouncing country miss; and yet he had the colour of a fine black-and-white print.

She answered his question charmingly:

"If you still want to work with me."

"I do—I do. But how to go to work bothers me. You see, I am not—I fear I never can be—diplomatic."

All traces of the doctor had vanished. He stood before her, clothed with an endearing humility and humanity. Cicely might, at her age, be deemed incapable of thus sum-

Digitized by Google

ming up a passing phase in a man who attracted her, but she grasped the essential fact: he loathed to inflict pain on others. His mission in life was obviously to alleviate suffering. Her first thought was: "How wisely he has chosen his profession!" She said softly:

"I think I understand and sympathise. But your Mother——?"

She broke off abruptly, unable, perhaps unwilling, to give words to sensibilities still inarticulate. Very eagerly he took up the broken sentence.

"But I understand too. And just because she is your mother," he placed, unconsciously, the slightest emphasis on the personal pronoun, "I feel so much the more bothered."

"Please don't bother too much!"

She held out her hand and went her way.

III

The visit to Wilverley, postponed on account of Mrs. Rockram's illness, duly took place. By this time Grimshaw was unable to disguise from himself that Cicely had become The Woman. Without being squeamishly modest, he could not believe that he was regarded by the maid as "The Man." A romantic situation might be heightened, if it could be recorded that Cicely was The First Woman. She was nothing of the kind. But to a man of imaginative temperament The First Woman is reincarnated in her successors. The ideal survives. The elusive She approaches, beguiles, and vanishes. Nevertheless, somewhere, some day, she may reappear and be captured. A counterfeit presentment of Cicely had jilted Grimshaw rather cruelly just before he buried himself in Essex. Babbington-Raikes, sound psychologist, may have reflected that Champions of the

Digitized by Google

Poor and Oppressed are fashioned more easily out of men whose personal ambitions have suffered eclipse. The gentlemen of the Lost Legion are the finest fighters in the world.

Memories of the jilt still rankled. Like Cicely, she had shone brightly as a young lady of quality, a brilliant of many facets. Shamelessly breaking her engagement, she had married a rubber potentate who had found a fortune and lost a liver in the Malay Peninsula. "O my cousin, shallow-hearted! O my Amy, mine no more!" Now, he could thank God that she was not his, and laugh derisively at his infatuation for her. But how she had bewitched him!

His host at Wilverley welcomed Grimshaw with cordiality, and showed him the model estate of the county, discussing eagerly plans for its further improvement.

"And it pays, it pays," he repeated several times. "You can take a squint at my books if you like."

"I'm sure it pays," Grimshaw replied.

Wilverley's father had been an ironmaster, who had bought an impoverished property and was frowned on at first as a carpet-bagger by the county families. They eyed him more favourably after Gladstone ennobled him, and smiled approval when he became a Liberal-Unionist. As a man of great executive ability he had applied business methods to agriculture, scrapping obsolete machinery and buildings. His son—so Grimshaw decided—seemed to have inherited his father's business aptitudes without his disabilities. Wilverley waxed confidential after dinner.

"My father had a rotten digestion: bad grub when he was a kid. I can digest anything—anything. The main trouble in the rural districts is insufficient food, vilely cooked and poor in quality. I see to it that my people are fed as well

Digitized by Google

as my horses. Food and shelter, there you have it in tabloid form. No able-bodied young men emigrate from here."

Grimshaw listened, impressed by his host's energy and cocksureness. Obviously, this was a man who got what he wanted, because he wanted it with a restless passion for achievement that couldn't be denied. But the professional eye, noting a heightened colour after meals, began to doubt the assumption that Lord Wilverley could digest anything.

A luscious opulence characterised the immense house throughout, a Victorian splendour of brocade, gilt cornices, mirrors, French polish, and Axminster carpets. In effective contrast, Wilverley wore shabby tweeds, and might have been mistaken by a short-sighted stranger for one of his own less prosperous tenants. The amount of work he accomplished in twenty-four hours amazed Grimshaw, who knew what hard work was. How much time would be left to cherish a wife?

Wilverley spoke with entire frankness about the Chandos family.

"The good old sort, but reactionary; always have been. The prettiest place in the country run abominably to seed. You have your work cut out there. Pawley, I take it, will soon retire . . . *and then* . . . ?"

He stared fixedly at Grimshaw.

"I may retire first," said Grimshaw.

"Then I'm mistaken in my man," declared Wilverley, almost explosively.

"I know when I'm beaten, Lord Wilverley." He added quietly: "But I shan't throw up the sponge yet. Miss Chandos is not reactionary."

"Miss Chandos?" Wilverley frowned slightly. "Hardly out!"

"She counts."

Digitized by Google

"Miss Chandos will marry. And, if I know her, she would never run counter to her mother. Don't make trouble between them, I beg you. She sided with us the other evening merely out of a girlish desire to ginger up a rather dull dinner."

Grimshaw remained silent, and Wilverley began to talk about the war, which, in his opinion, couldn't last long, K. of K. to the contrary. Soldiers were rank pessimists. Business interests would be paramount. Civilisation wouldn't tolerate the dislocation of industry . . . and so forth.

Next morning Grimshaw left early, after promising to come again. He had liked his host, reckoning him, quite rightly, to be an honest man and a capable. He recalled a platitude often on the lips of his father: "We are sent into this world to better it." According to this gauge, Wilverley had "made good." And a wife, with a sense of humour, would round off his corners, trim his quills, and conciliate his unfriends. But probably she would give even more than she would get.

He reflected, not without bitterness, upon what Cicely Chandos would get if she took Wilverley.

IV

During the epoch-making weeks that followed he saw little of her, being engrossed by his work. After the battle of the Marne, Wilverley Court was turned into a Red Cross Hospital, and Cicely enrolled herself as a V.A.D. Brian, by this time, was in France, having survived the retreat from Mons. Pawley had come back, much the better for a long holiday. He congratulated his partner with almost paternal effusion:

"They all like you, my boy. Gentle and simple——!"

Digitized by Google

"The simple are not as simple as they appear," said Grimshaw.

"Ah! You have been talking to them, eh? Any—complaints?"

"Nothing verbal. They say what they think I wish them to say. I get most of my information from the kiddies. They give the Chandos dynasty dead away."

Pawley made a deprecating gesture.

"I know—I know. But what can one do?"

Grimshaw answered grimly:

"Waking, and sometimes in my dreams, that question worries me confoundedly. I'm at the cross-roads. For the moment, I suppose, I must mark time. Dash it!" he continued, with rare irritability, "how can I pester Lady Selina with my pet schemes when she is absorbed with anxiety about her son?" Had he been absolutely truthful, he would have added: "And how can I run the risk of hostilising the mother of the girl I love?"

"Yes, yes; God help all these poor mothers."

For a season the nettle was dropped, to be grasped firmly later on.

To make matters more difficult for a perplexed and unhappy man in love with a young woman apparently predestined to be the bride of another, Lady Selina had followed her son's advice, and was being consistently civil and kind, a much easier task than she had anticipated inasmuch as Cicely was absent from home. Grimshaw enjoyed some rough shooting, and found so many snipe in the bog behind the village that he reconsidered the propriety of draining it. Tired by his day's work, snug in a big arm-chair, he was sorely tempted to let things drift. But every morning, after his cold tub, fighting instincts reasserted themselves. The gorgeous possibility of capturing mother and daughter rose with the sun and illumined his heaven. Two birds to

Digitized by Google

one shot—a notable right and left! Meanwhile Mrs. Rockram had become his devoted slave. To talk to Mrs. Rockram about Cicely would be indiscreet; to listen to her chatter on the same fascinating subject was another matter. Indeed, what news he got of Cicely generally filtered through this loyal old retainer. From her he learned that Wilverley had left the Court and was living with his agent. The big house was handed over to my lord's married sister, apparently a formidable person, bristling, like her brother, with restless activities. Cicely, it seemed, went to bed each night nearly foundered!

"I ain't one to gossip," remarked Mrs. Rockram as November drew to a close. "I've never done it, never!"

"Oh, Mrs. Rockram! What a difference between us! I love a bit of gossip. What is gossip? A kindly indication of interest in the affairs of others."

"Well, sir, that's as may be. And the housekeeper at the Court is a particular friend of mine, and not one to carry a foolish tale."

"Out with it, Mrs. Rockram. What tale does she wag?"

Mrs. Rockram answered cautiously:

"It ends happily, sir, as tales should do—with the wedding bells."

"I'm still in the dark," said Grimshaw.

He felt, as he spoke, that he should remain so. Cimmerian blackness encompassed him, a Stygian fog. Wilverley had retreated, so to speak, before the final assault. He had trailed clouds of glory behind him. Thanks to his organising powers, the new hospital had been acclaimed as a model. And it was full of heroes and hero-worshippers. Grimshaw had hoped that his services might have been required, but red-tape vetoed this. The medical officer in charge was a "Major" in spurs. Wilverley, of

Digitized by Google

course, had made the most of his opportunities. Mrs. Rockram went on:

"I ain't. When I seen Miss Cicely in her uniform, I says to Mr. Rockram, 'My lord's a goner.' "

Grimshaw attempted to smile. The music was out of his voice as he asked:

"Is it settled?"

Mrs. Rockram was inclined to think so. Could there be a better match? One, surely, of Heaven's own making. She concluded: "We have always known that my lord was sweet as sweet on her."

Grimshaw could not envisage Wilverley as "sweet." And Mrs. Rockram's evidence was flimsy, mere hearsay from the housekeeper at the Court. Still, the very likelihood of the affair gnawed at him raveningly. A day or two later Pawley said to him:

"Thank God, Brian is now reasonably safe!"

"Why this fervour?"

"Lady Selina expects to lose Cicely."

"Who told you so?"

An inflection in the young man's voice made Pawley regard him more attentively. Grimshaw's face, however, remained expressionless. Pawley replied as guardedly as Mrs. Rockram:

"She admitted to me that Wilverley had dropped the handkerchief; and it seems reasonably certain that it will be picked up. He's a masterful man."

"He is," Grimshaw assented. "Would—would Lady Selina bring pressure to bear?"

Again Pawley's eyes showed surprise.

"Um! Pressure? Why should there be pressure, except from him?"

Cornered, rather confused, with a tinge of colour in his pale cheeks, Grimshaw said hastily:

Digitized by Google

"I can't see him as a lover. He would, as you put it, drop the handkerchief and make sure of its being picked up at once. A girl of spirit mightn't quite like that."

V

With the colder weather, Upworthy boasted a cleaner bill of health, although the more elderly villagers suffered abominably from rheumatism. Anxious to "spare" Lady Selina, but even more anxious to mitigate conditions which might be improved, Grimshaw tackled Gridley, the power behind the throne exercising a sly, persistent authority which few could measure, least of all the lady of the manor. Gridley had succeeded his father as bailiff of the Chandos domain. Thousands of just such men are to be found in our southern and western counties. And more than half the misery in the rural districts can be traced to them, directly and indirectly. Back of their abuse of power lies, of course, the indolence of the landlord. And behind this again—ignorance. All Gridleys have in common a desire to make things easy for their employers. They stand doggedly as buffers between comfort and discomfort, between peace of mind and innumerable pettifogging worries and acerbities. Villagers dare not appeal to Cæsar. How many schoolboys beard a headmaster, indicting some unjust member of his staff? Villagers are children. They never cut loose from leading-strings. They whine to each other, and make a "visiting face" in the presence of the "quality." They live, most of them, for the passing hour, seldom dwelling upon the future because, instinctively, they dread it. Who denies them great qualities? But they will be the better understood when it is admitted frankly that their unwritten code is poles apart from the code of the privileged classes. With the poor patience is a greater

Digitized by Google

virtue than truthfulness; fidelity ranks above chastity; justice counts for nothing in comparison with generosity.

Gridley lived in a comfortable house at the Home Farm, with a wife whom he regarded as a general servant, and several children. After his day's work, he befuddled himself with beer, but he prided himself upon rising each morning perfectly sober. He was reasonably abstemious in local taverns, and attended church, making the responses in a loud voice, conscious that the approving ear of Lady Selina heard him. He was a member of the district and parish councils. He could, and did, make life hell for any beneath him in the social scale who presumed to thwart his wishes and commands.

At first he showed himself obsequious and complaisant to the new doctor. But he began to squirm under Grimshaw's questions, wriggling out of them, evading them, trying to throw dust into eyes penetratingly clear. Grimshaw took his measure in five minutes. Nevertheless, for Lady Selina's sake, he wished to give the fellow a chance. Possibly Gridley mistook courtesy for weakness. More than probably he took for granted that country doctors prefer to travel along lines of least resistance.

Finally, after many exasperating and unavailing interviews, Grimshaw spoke plainly:

"You are forcing me to the conclusion, Mr. Gridley, that you run Upworthy to suit yourself."

Doctor and bailiff had met outside a cottage which held a young married woman sadly crippled by incipient arthritis. Her bed rested upon a floor eaten up by dry-rot. Putting his foot through a board, Grimshaw had discovered masses of thick, white, velvety fungus, which smelt horribly. He discovered further that the waste-pipes from the eaves were choked up; water trickled down the inside walls. When he called Gridley's attention to this state of things, the

Digitized by Google

bailiff promptly promised immediate repairs, which were not forthcoming. Grimshaw could have appealed to Lady Selina. But anything of that sort meant open war with Gridley, the precipitation of a crisis. It meant, for the lady of the manor, an instant choice between an old servant and a comparative stranger. It meant, if Grimshaw won (and the possibilities of losing obtruded itself), finding a new bailiff, breaking him in, endless worry and perplexity. To find the right man at such a time, when ability of any sort was at a tremendous premium, might be impracticable. To add to the difficulties of the case, he knew that witnesses for the prosecution of a tyrant would be hard to find. Gridley, and his father before him, had imposed silence upon Upworthy. The Extons were notable examples of what might happen to the recalcitrant. Favours, innumerable doles—coal, fire-wood, milk, clothing and small grants in aid—were distributed amongst the optimists who, when Lady Selina made her periodical rounds, presented shining faces and grateful hearts. The wise gaffers sang praises of "honest John" behind his back and to his brazen face. Nicodemus Burble, the octogenarian, piped the popular conviction: "I allers says it pays to treat bailiffs wi' respect, for why, my sonnies? Because they can make it so danged uncomfortsome for we, if we don't."

Gridley, thus addressed by a young man whom he regarded hitherto as negligible, was much taken aback. Clever enough to know that procrastination would no longer avail him, he tried insolence instead:

"Do I? I'd have you to understand, Mr. Grimshaw, that I can mind my business, as my father did before me, and I'll thank you to mind yours."

With that he turned on his heel, glaring savagely.

"Wait!" said Grimshaw, in his quietest tone.

Gridley swung round. Grimshaw met his congested glance.

Digitized by Google

"The misery in Upworthy is my business."

"Ho, is it?"

"Yes; I can break a hornet's nest about your ears, and I'm in the mood to do it. I can get the medical officer of health for the county down here, and if I do, you and your father's business, which you manage as abominably as he did, will be blown to—to your ultimate destination."

Gridley stared at him in stupefaction. Hitherto, the local sanitary inspector, with well-greased palms, had seen to it that his chief should be spared such visitations. Altering his tone slightly, he growled out:

"Her ladyship will have something to say to that."

"Cut her ladyship out of this. I propose to deal with you. Her ladyship has entrusted you with powers which you have abused, grossly abused, to your own advantage."

Gridley, with unpleasant memories of John Exton, and confronted by a tense athletic figure, said sullenly:

"I suppose I can't stop you talking."

"You can't. You like being top dog. And because you came from the people, you're hard on the people. You treat them as dirt."

Gridley laughed brutally, as a not unreasonable fear of personal violence passed from him.

"That's what they are, most of 'em—dirt."

Grimshaw smiled derisively, beholding in Gridley the reactionary of the Labour Party, the common type that rides rough-shod over the foot-passengers, bespattering them with mud. Some of the self-styled leaders of Labour in Poplar were just like him—arrogant, insolent and ignorant, seeking their own advancement with specious canting words on their thick lips, secretly distrusted by the very class whom they tried to rule and direct. He divined that Gridley hated, in his heart, the benefactress who trusted him, that he would be the first—given the opportunity—

Digitized by Google

to bite the hand that had fed him. And such men scorn decent treatment. They can be subdued by the weapon they use—the lash. Grimshaw continued, not so quietly:

"I'm on to your little games. You and that greedy idiot, the sanitary inspector, and four-fifths of the district council, play into each other's hands, and laugh and wink over it."

Gridley tried sarcasm:

"Ho! Downin' one of your own sort now?"

"You allude to our local medical officer. I wonder how you'd like me to take on that job?"

"Why don't you?" He laughed again.

"I may," replied Grimshaw incisively. "Lady Selina Chandos has always wanted to do her best for her people, but that never suited your book. Why? Because when light comes to her you'll be scrapped first."

"Have it your own way, Mr. Grimshaw, and thanks for warning me."

"I do warn you. For the moment, I shall leave her ladyship in peace. I am dealing with you. Mend your ways here and now. Does the new flooring go in at once—or not?"

"I told you the job should be done. We're short-handed."

"Will it go in at once, within twenty-four hours?"

"Yes, it will." He paused, adding cringingly:

"I didn't mean to give offence, sir."

Grimshaw replied tensely:

"Good. Keep what I've said to yourself, and I shall do the same."

Within the time exacted the new flooring was put in. Grimshaw knew, of course, that he had made a dangerous enemy, but this heartened rather than dismayed him, salving a sensitive conscience. He believed that he could deal with Gridley, and through Gridley with others. Lady Selina must be left in peace till peace came back to a world in travail.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IV

CHIEFLY CONCERNING CICELY

I

CICELY, till the war broke out, accepted life very much as she found it, although at school a glimmering had come to her that it wasn't for all girls the pleasant pilgrimage from cradle to altar, and thence in the remote future to the grave, which a daughter of the House of Chandos might naturally deem it. She and Arabella Tiddle had agreed that they belonged to the Sunshiners, as Arabella put it—flowers in a parterre, carefully tended and cherished. It must be awful, for instance, to be like Miss Spong and Miss Minchin, assistant mistresses, labelled by their pupils as "Spot" and "Plain." Everybody knew that Miss Spong's father drank, even on Sundays; and Miss Minchin, it was generally believed, worked hard during the "hols" as a typist. The whole school had sustained an appalling shock when little Doris Reed mysteriously vanished from a classroom and was never seen again. Her father, a fraudulent bankrupt, had walked into a tunnel, preferring to meet an express train rather than his infuriated creditors. All the details were in the daily papers. One of Cicely's friends, a queer, tall, scraggy girl, interested herself in criminology, collecting clippings wherever she might find them which set forth horrors. She was honourably known as "Old Gooseflesh," and possessed a perfectly thrilling brooch revealing under crystal a tiny strand of a rope upon which a murderer had been hanged!

Digitized by Google

Cicely, however, as a "Sunshiner," turned her head from these shadows. A tithe of her pocket-money was given in charity. One girl, chronically hard up, borrowed five shillings which were never repaid. Ought this to be regarded as part of the tithe? Arabella, with inherited business instincts, answered in the affirmative. Eventually Cicely wrote to Dr. Pawley about it, and he decided against Arabella. A fortnight later Cicely received a box of chocolates which Arabella priced at ten shillings. For a week at least Cicely wondered who had sent the chocolates. She wrote an effusive letter of thanks to Brian, who sent another box, expressing regret that he had not thought of sending the first. Cicely, with a chocolate in her mouth, observed triumphantly:

"You see, Tiddy, out of evil comes good."

"Yes; you're fifteen bob up on the deal."

From this happy conclusion there was no budging. Goodrich preached the comfortable doctrine from the pulpit; experience confirmed it. Evil had to be, because good oozed out of it. In the same philosophic spirit Arabella's father advertised the virtues of Tiddle's Family Pellets. If people didn't suffer with dyspepsia Lady Tiddle wouldn't wear pearls.

Cicely left school and returned to Upworthy with half a dozen delightful vistas of fun and enjoyment in front of her. Hunting, tennis, balls, jolly house parties, presentation at Court, and a London season. . . .

The outbreak of war closed all these avenues down which she and Arabella had hoped to dance so joyously.

Lady Selina, moreover, refused to share Arthur Wilverley's conviction that the interests of high finance and industry would be paramount in determining hostilities within a year. Her brother, Lord Saltaire, held not such rosy views. Inspissated gloom settled upon that nobleman, not

Digitized by Google

without reason. His vast estates were heavily dipped; he had never been able to lay by a penny-piece; the calls upon his ever-diminishing purse were innumerable. He said to his sister:

"The burden of increased taxation will be back-breaking, my dear Selina. We shall be hit harder than any other class. So I advise you to economise. Cut down expenses to the irreducible minimum! That's my first and last word."

Lady Selina sent for Gridley.

"Lord Saltaire," she told her obsequious bailiff, "is reducing expenses to the minimum. We must do the same."

"Very good, my lady."

She added, with an irritability rare with her:

"So pray don't come bothering me about money. For the present, and for some time to come, we must 'carry on'—that, I am told, is the correct expression—as best we may."

"Certainly, my lady. In my humble opinion, the Hearl is right. I hope your ladyship knows that I shall cut down everything."

He spoke as if the prospect of cheeseparing afforded him intense satisfaction, but Lady Selina didn't notice that, and remarked:

"Yes, yes; you are a good, faithful soul. We must practise self-denial, even in our charities."

Much to her gratification, Cicely behaved like a perfect darling. It made the fond mother miserable to think that her girl should have her "coming out" burked by cruel fate. But Cicely kissed her and said:

"I shall enjoy my good time all the more when it does come, Mums."

Lady Selina inclined her head mournfully. She entertained no delusions on that point. Procrastination did not

Digitized by Google

enhance the virgin joys of "coming out." Nevertheless, she confronted an abominable situation with fortitude, making no protest when Cicely insisted upon becoming a V.A.D. That meant the loss of more "bloom." Balm descended upon her lacerated tissues, you may be sure, when Cicely went to Wilverley Court. If dear Arthur seized this great opportunity all would be well. Striving to interpret the inscrutable ways of Providence, she seemed to discern the Omnipotent Finger tracing Cicely's future in gleaming letters upon a dark background. Left alone in her big house, she denied herself cream, and drastically reduced her establishment.

It will be admitted that Grimshaw, bursting with impatience to give Upworthy a cleaner bill of health, had not chosen the most opportune moment to further his plans.

II

We shall behold Cicely with clearer vision "on her own" at Wilverley.

She plunged eagerly into hard work, thereby winning an approving smile from "Matron," an uncompromising "pro," not likely to favour a young woman merely because she happened to belong to the "county." Exalted above "Matron" sat Mrs. Roden, Wilverley's sister, who had married one of the Quaker Rodens, a pillar of the Liberal Party, and as indefatigable as his wife in what he considered to be "good works." George Roden was supposed to be in touch with the masses, although he was a rich man. As an M.P. and a subordinate member of the Government, he pulled many strings, being recognised as a peacemaker and intermediary between Labour and Capital. His wife shared his views. In and out of season Mrs. Roden preached solemnly the doctrines of adjustment. She adjusted her own life and

Digitized by Google

the lives of others, particularly the lives of others. As an ardent democrat she contended that all classes, not merely Labour, should be fairly treated in the New Commonwealth at last to be discerned rising superbly above the troubled waters. Fortunately, inasmuch as the good lady was something of a bore, we are not much concerned with her or her excellent husband. But she exercised influence upon Cicely at a moment when the girl was most sensitive to outside impressions.

Mrs. Roden, after serious consideration, decided that Cicely was destined to be the mother of Wilverley's children. Motherhood may be described as her *cheval de bataille*. Upon this charger she rode boldly into the future, couching her lance against that dragon Infant Mortality. Cicely's physique, her feminine curves, her clear complexion and candid eyes, fortified the conviction that she would nurse her babies, and Mrs. Roden said so, with no squeamish reserves, to Wilverley himself.

"Good heavens, Mary, what things you think of!"

Mrs. Roden replied austerely:

"I focus my thoughts, Arthur, on the essential. Large families will be the crying need of the next decade."

"I hope my kids won't cry."

"Pray don't be flippant! I am honoured that you have given me your confidence. Cicely is young, but I was nineteen when I married George. I was a mother at twenty. I have never regretted it. I deplore years wasted in bunny-hugging and fox trots. If this war trains young girls to take themselves more seriously it will not have been waged in vain. I shall talk to dear little Cicely."

"Not—not about my babies?"

"You can leave all that to me."

"Cicely, bless her! is a bit of a tomboy. I'm sure she would shrink from—from—*you know*."

Digitized by Google

Mrs. Roden enjoined silence, uplifting a large, capable hand.

"My dear Arthur, you have the disabilities of your sex. Never having suffered from excess of modesty yourself, you imagine that young girls are immaculately innocent and ignorant. Pray purge your mind of that! They are nothing of the sort. They discuss everything nowadays with a refreshing candour that is not the least significant sign of the times. Now for a word of advice to you. If you want her, go for her—go for her! Young girls fall easily in love with the first energetic bidder. I take it you are the first?"

"I—I think so, Mary."

"Then I repeat—go for her!"

Seldom indeed did Mrs. Roden use expressions even approximating to slang. Wilverley saw that her interest was seriously engaged.

III

Mrs. Roden had been right in assuming Cicely to be neither immaculately innocent nor ignorant of what she termed "essential facts." She and Arabella had discussed marriage and even motherhood quite naturally, but not often, being mainly engrossed with tennis and hockey and, subsidiary to these, their work in class. Arabella insisted that they must be near the head of the procession and maintain an honourable position without undue "mugging." A good report, indeed, at the close of her school career had transmuted thousands of pills into the pearls which Lady Selina so admired.

Arabella, it will be remembered, had this strangle-hold over Cicely. Lady Tiddle had graduated in life at a shoe factory. Arabella acknowledged, with pardonable pride, that her second cousin on the maternal side was a housemaid. Cicely was friendly with housemaids at the Manor,

Digitized by Google

but, in strict obedience to Lady Selina, never familiar with them. Arabella pronounced this abstention to be a loss, not a gain. She had talked very freely with the second cousin.

"They have an enormous bulge over us, Cis. You see, they get to know men. Our information is second-hand. Lily"—that happened to be the name of the second cousin—"has had a dozen boys on and off. She began when she was fifteen. She's as straight as they make 'em, you know, but dead nuts on spooning."

Cicely winced at this, although curiosity pricked her. Conscious that she needn't ask for details, because Arabella always supplied them, she held her tongue. Arabella continued:

"Lily can make comparisons, weigh Tom against Dick, scrap both, and take on Bill. I call that true liberty. I don't see why an intelligent girl, anxious to get the right sort of hubby, as, of course, we all are, shouldn't be engaged half a dozen times."

"Tiddy——!"

"That's my idea. Probably Father, who is becoming rather rankly conservative since he was knighted, will put the kibosh on that, but how, I ask, can you know what a man is really like till he has kissed you?"

"What perfectly awful things you say!"

"All right! I'm a red poppy, and proud of it. You're the wee crimson-tippit daisy. Be a daisy if you like. I'll call you—Dais."

"Tiddy, please don't! I'll try not to be a daisy. You do give one ideas. But kissing——! That is housemaidy, if you like." She frowned and then quoted triumphantly: "'Her lips are common as the stairs.' Ugh!"

Arabella laughed. Perhaps she wanted to shock a too aristocratic friend.

Digitized by Google

"Oh, well, Lily thinks no more of that than you do of brushing your teeth."

"I should have to brush my teeth, Tiddy, if any man dared to kiss me."

Such talks, infrequent as they might be, stimulated imagination. Lady Selina may have wondered why Miss Tiddle was chosen by Cicely as her particular "chum." Surely there were—others? But the others lacked personality. Arabella imposed herself. Her liveliness, her audacity, her humour—were irresistible.

Cicely's first action on becoming a V.A.D. was to write to Miss Tiddle, entreating her to join the staff at Wilverley. Sir Nathaniel Tiddle, after a heartening glance at the peerage and "Who's Who," raised no objection. Finally it was arranged that Arabella should "weigh in" with the New Year.

Meanwhile, Cicely was seeing Arthur Wilverley every day.

IV

He "went for her" according to his own methods, not above criticism. The "Ars Amatoria" of Ovid is hardly out of date, but that lively treatise was not to be found in the Court library. Wilverley's notion of courting would have been termed by his sister—self-expression. The honest fellow wanted Cicely to see him in all his moods and tenses before conjugation. He talked unweariedly about Arthur Wilverley. Beware of branding him too hastily as egoist or prig! He happened to be neither. Like his sister, the welfare of others lay next his heart. At the same time it seemed to be an imperative duty to reveal himself to his future wife.

Cicely was rather impressed at first.

And it is not unreasonable to affirm that he might have

Digitized by Google

got her *au premier coup* had Grimshaw remained in Poplar. Comparisons between Grimshaw and Wilverley became inevitable. Cicely was not unversed in such mental exercises. At school young ladies of the ripe age of fifteen were invited to compare, in parallel columns, Napoleon with Wellington, Gladstone with Disraeli, Thackeray with Dickens. The prize-winning contributions were published in the school magazine, typed and edited by the overworked Miss Minchin.

Cicely wrote as follows to her dearest Tiddy:

"I do wish you were here, because I'm dying to talk to you about Arthur Wilverley. I'm sure you will think him rather a dear. Anyway, he's been ever so nice to me. No chocs! He's not that sort. Plenty of good, sensible talk, which is flattering, isn't it? I sometimes think that he's practising on me, trying on sentences which he means to use in public. He's our star landlord in these parts, and makes poor Mother gasp when he tells her what she ought to do at Upworthy. Of course, he's frightfully rich. Have I mentioned Mr. Grimshaw to you?" (O Cicely——!) "He's Dr. Pawley's new partner, and *very* clever. But this cleverness doesn't stick out of him, thank goodness! Arthur and he took a fancy to each other when they first met, because they have a lot in common—better rural conditions, and all that. I told both of them that it was no use hustling and bustling Mother. Mr. Grimshaw bottles himself up; Arthur uncorks himself. Already I seem to know everything he has done and is going to do. I'm afraid that you will say he's not wildly exciting. Nothing subtle about him. He strikes me as being immensely 'safe.' One couldn't imagine him letting anybody down, or letting himself down. Mr. Grimshaw is better-looking. He might come to grief if things went very wrong with him. Or he might climb to giddy heights.

Digitized by Google

"Mother is pinching a bit—no cream! She says it's fattening. Most of our neighbours are pinching for patriotic reasons, but some of them like it. This hateful war shows us all up. Mrs. Roden (Arthur's sister) is a *scream!* You will love pulling her leg. It's rather against Arthur that he can't see how funny she is——"

A postscript was added:

"Mr. Grimshaw has dark, disconcerting eyes. I'm afraid he's very poor."

To this artless epistle Miss Tiddle replied by return of post.

"I wish I were at Wilverley," she wrote, "because your letter is a dead give-away. You're working up a 'pash' for this young man with the disconcerting eyes!!! And I'll bet my string of pearls against a boot-lace that he's a better chap than your Arthur, who doesn't appeal to me at all. I see by the peerage that he's nearly forty, and probably getting bald. Why does he talk to you? Why not write to me as a pal should? Before you get this, he may have proposed, without a word of warning from me. And likely as not you'll blush and say 'yes,' because, obviously, the whole thing has been a put-up job. My tip is: flirt sweetly with both of them, and *don't commit yourself!* I have three affairs on—no end of a rag! If necessary, I'll have a go at your Arthur. Try him out! I expect he's too fat, mentally and physically, for my taste. But I'd sacrifice myself for you. I shall look forward to meeting Mr. Grimshaw. If he's poor and clever, he'll reach up and help himself to the needful, with you dangling at the end of the pole as a prize.

"My lady-mother is pinching too. We no longer dine the people we don't like. But we shall freeze on to our footmen till public opinion wrenches them from us. . . ."

This letter constrained Cicely to collate her virginal

Digitized by Google

thoughts with Miss Tiddle's vulgar words. Vulgar, be it noted, is used as "vernacular." Shakespeare might have described Miss Tiddle's prose as "naked as the vulgar air." Lady Selina might have used the adjective in its commoner acceptation. It would have shocked her inexpressibly had she been told that her child was "working up a pash" for anybody, even if he were a young duke with all the gifts of the gods. Cicely, however, knew her "Tiddy," and took no offence. But . . . was she thinking too much of this man with the disconcerting eyes? Did he stand, square to the four winds of heaven, between herself and Arthur? She asked herself the question when she was engaged in preparing a pailful of disinfectant. One would prefer to envisage the nymph in a fragrant rose-garden, plucking the dewy blossoms, inhaling with them the sweet freshness of morning. . . . Cicely had just finished scrubbing the floor of the dispensary; the pungent odour of carbolic assailed her pretty nose. And it served well enough, better perhaps than any rose, to kill the parasitic sentimental growths which so often clog and obscure a maiden's true understanding of herself.

What was Grimshaw to her?

Being still a child in many ways, she applied the nursery test. If she were in a boat with the two men, and the boat upset, and it were possible for her to save one of the two, which one would be saved?

Her lively imagination, unduly stimulated by Tiddy's prose, beheld the two appealing faces mutely beseeching her for life and love. She hesitated. The heads sank, to bob up again. She positively shivered with indecision. Then she laughed. The prescient Tiddy had hit the mark. Arthur was . . . well, not thin. He suggested floating. If he turned on his broad back and stopped struggling, he would float. But Grimshaw would sink . . . !

Digitized by Google

The test sufficed. Cicely filled her pail, and carried it demurely into a ward.

V

She knew by this time why Arthur talked to her with such flattering insistence. Tiddy would call it "window dressing." Was it flirting to listen attentively, to appraise the wares, to smile demurely, to watch him inflate with the deliberate intention of deflating him later on? At this point, her thoughts became nebulous. If she knew Arthur better, she might like him more. When did liking turn into a warmer sentiment?

She went home for a week-end before Christmas.

Immediately she realised that her mother's first kiss included a benediction. Lady Selina held her hands, gently pressing them. Then, with an exclamation of dismay, she examined them, noting broken nails, roughness of skin, and faint stains which defied Scrubbs' Ammonia.

"Oh, dear!"

"Honourable scars, Mums."

"The whole world is topsy-turvy. I hear you are called 'Shandy.'"

"Matron calls me Chandos, and the V.A.D.s Shandy. What does it matter? I'm as hard as nails, and frightfully hungry. I hope you have a topping dinner."

"Everything *you* like, darling. We shall be quite alone. Stimson is single-handed. This is a season of fasting and prayer, but you shan't fast here."

Cicely hugged her, exuberantly glad to be at home again, but sensible of a change that tugged at her heart-strings. The old graciousness remained, the erect figure, the well-poised head, all the tiny authoritative gestures. But the smooth eyelids drooped more heavily, hiding anxious eyes.

Digitized by Google

The right word came to her later, when they sat together in Lady Selina's room.

Forlorn . . .!

What a word to apply to her mother! Always, she had thought of that mother as self-sufficing. Lady Selina, of course, was accustomed to being alone. She liked to entertain at due intervals—a Chandos tradition; she paid occasional visits; she spent periodic weeks at an old-fashioned hotel in London, in a cul-de-sac, where a gentlewoman could sleep between lavender-scented sheets, and almost believe that she was in the country.

Forlorn . . .!

Several reasons jumped into Cicely's mind: maternal anxiety about Brian, a reduced establishment that forbade entertaining, her own absence from home at a time, possibly, when a devoted mother had set her heart upon "doing things" with her and for her. Without hesitation, she said abruptly:

"Would you like me to stay at home, Mums?"

Evidently, Lady Selina had considered this. She answered quickly:

"No. We must all do our duty, child."

"You look so forlorn."

It was impossible to keep back the insistent word. Lady Selina frowned.

"Forlorn? I didn't know that I looked forlorn, whatever I may feel at times. There are—moments . . ." She sighed, and then said with her usual energy: "But they pass. You are a sympathetic creature, Cicely. I ought to be ashamed of looking or feeling forlorn when I have two such good children. And so many good friends. They have been very considerate." She paused, faintly smiling. "You know, dear, even Mr. Grimshaw leaves me in peace."

Digitized by Google

Cicely hoped that she was not blushing, as she murmured:

"Heavens! Why shouldn't he?"

"I anticipated pesterings. A man with his ideas . . . Thousands of pounds! And now, when we all have to think in pence. He is certainly clever. Our people like him. I have given him some shooting. The partridges we had at dinner were shot by him. I see very little of him. Does he go to Wilverley?"

She shot a glance at Cicely, who thanked her stars that she was able to answer truthfully:

"Never!"

Lady Selina brightened. Not for a king's ransom would she have pleaded dear Arthur's cause. To do so, however delicately, might invite disaster. And it would be equally indiscreet to "run down" a too attractive, impecunious young man. She decided that a little faint praise was much safer.

"By the way, he is *not* one of the Grimthorpe Grimshaws. But he will do very well, and in due time step into dear Dr. Pawley's shoes."

"His list slippers."

Lady Selina blinked, and then shied away from rebuke, a notable abstention. Cicely continued hastily:

"Mr. Grimshaw is a gentleman. Nothing else matters."

"His grandfather, I am told, was a China merchant, whatever that may mean. As for 'gentleman,' I am inclined to think my dear father defined the now odious word properly."

"What was his definition?"

"He contended that the word had nothing to do with moral attributes. A 'gentleman,' in his opinion, was a man neither directly nor indirectly connected with trade."

Digitized by Google

Cicely opened her lips, and then closed them. She could score heavily by asking whether the son of an ironmaster could, under this definition, be termed a gentleman. But she reflected that her mother would retort that the ironmaster had been created a peer of the realm. Lady Selina went on blandly:

"Your grandfather once 'turned down,' as you put it, a clever young man who applied to him for the post of private secretary. He presented himself at dinner in a made-up tie."

"Heavens!"

"I think my father was quite right. A gentleman never offends in small matters. I deplore the fact that your friend Arabella pronounces G-I-R-L 'gurl.' How do you pronounce it?"

Cicely smiled.

"It depends upon whom I'm talking to, Mums. I shouldn't say 'gurl' before you. I suppose you'd have a fit if I asked for a 'serviette' instead of a 'napkin'?"

"It would nearly kill me," replied Lady Selina solemnly.

"Arabella nearly died when she heard an old duchess pronounce 'yellow' 'yaller.'"

"That used to be the proper pronunciation, my dear."

Cicely held her tongue.

Lady Selina, as usual, blamed the school. A girl brought up at home would not venture to criticise, even allusively, her elders. She was aware that Miss Tiddle criticised the Author of her Being! Cicely hastily changed the talk, describing, not without sprightliness, her adventures and misadventures as a V.A.D. Incidentally she mentioned Wilverley, conscious at once that the atmosphere became charged with electricity. Lady Selina, at mere mention of his name, purred with pleasure. To stroke her fur the right way became a temptation hard to resist. Cicely, how-

Digitized by Google

ever, succeeded in pleasing her mother without committing herself. That, at least, was her happy conviction when she went to bed. Snug in bed, and congratulating herself upon a strategy that Tiddy might have disdained, she heard a soft tap upon the door. Lady Selina, majestic in a brocaded dressing-gown, entered. Cicely was astonished and moved. Such visits were rare. Lady Selina fussed over her, tucked her up, and kissed her fondly, whispering:

"You are my own little girl. You mustn't worry about me. As I said, there are moments when this unhappy world seems upside down. I ask myself where I am. But I have the greatest confidence in you, darling. That is such a comfort—to be sure of those you love. Sleep well, and have breakfast in bed if you want to."

Cicely did not sleep too well. She lay awake for at least an hour, feeling strangely restless and uncomfortable. And she woke up many times, tingling with an exasperation which she tried in vain to resolve into elements. She wished both Wilverley and Grimshaw at Timbuctoo; she wished that she was like Tiddy, who could "take on" three suitors as a "rag"; she almost wished she had been born of humbler parentage. Tiddy assured her that the old order was "down and out," never to rise again. Admittedly, Tiddy knew nothing of the old order. And Cicely dimly beheld a new disorder, with blatant voices and not too clean linen, that might exercise a greater tyranny than any aristocracy of rank and starched shirts. For the moment, she ultimately decided, she knew what she wanted—to be left alone.

VI

She woke up delightfully surprised to find herself in her own pretty room, and with no desire for breakfast in bed. Snow had fallen during the night. Looking out of her win-

Digitized by Google

dow, she could see the conventional Christmas landscape. Nature seemed to have tidied everything for the great festival. Upon the previous afternoon Cicely noticed that the gardens had lost something of their trim appearance. Leaves rotted upon the paths and lawns. Rabbits had dared to invade the topiary garden! The snow covered leaves and fallen timber. Presently Lady Selina appeared, scattering crumbs for the friendly robins. Cicely greeted her gaily.

"You slept well, my darling?"

"Like a top."

"Capital."

They smiled at each other, Cicely reflecting that tops didn't really sleep. They spun round and round, just as she had during her vigils, and went into a sort of silly trance. And then they fell flatly down. Cicely had experienced all this and more; so she told the exact truth and pleased her mother at the same time. As a matter of fact, she detested lying, even white-lying. At school, lying, or any form of feminine deceit or guile, had been voted by the leaders of public opinion—bad form. Women, in the past, had been driven to subterfuge by brutal MAN. The New Woman, educated like a public-school boy, must tell the truth, and flaunt it if necessary, like an Oriflamme.

Mother and daughter attended Divine Service. Cicely perceived Dr. Pawley in his pew, but Mr. Grimshaw was conspicuously absent, a fact which distracted Cicely's thoughts from the Liturgy. The small church was full as usual, although many of the younger men had already joined up, not without some pressure from the parson and the lady of the manor. The more aged and infirm, in receipt of doles, quite understood that regular attendance "paid." Backsliders were overlooked when Lady Selina offered her "oblations" at the Midsummer and Christmas bun-

Digitized by Google

festivals. Just before Christmas beef-time the attendance was remarkable.

After church Dr. Pawley accounted satisfactorily for the absence of his colleague, who, it seemed, had spent the night with a child suffering horribly from croup.

"He never spares himself, good fellow," said Pawley. "In this case he insisted on sparing me."

Lady Selina inclined her head. The thought came to Cicely, to be dismissed as disloyal, that her mother had not seemed too well pleased when listening politely to Dr. Pawley's praises of his partner. Did she resent the young man's ever-increasing popularity in the village? Lady Selina strolled back to the Manor, saying nothing. In the old days Dr. Pawley was often invited to luncheon on Sundays. Cicely said presently:

"Are you expecting Dr. Pawley to luncheon, Mums?"

"No. Stimson has enough to do as it is. Besides, it would be difficult to leave out Mr. Grimshaw."

"But why leave him out?"

Lady Selina shrugged her shoulders, saying carelessly: "On ne s'entend pas avec tout le monde."

Cicely felt as if she had been slapped. It was the first time that her mother had deliberately chosen to indicate the social chasm between herself and a G.P. Cicely, off her guard, said indiscreetly:

"Mother!—Mr. Grimshaw is Brian's friend. I—I don't understand."

Lady Selina may have regretted a slip of the tongue. In her softest voice, she replied:

"My dear child, I have been extremely civil to Brian's friend. But there are—limits! I regard Dr. Pawley as an exception that proves the rule never broken by my dear father, for example."

"What rule?"

Digitized by Google

"I dislike dotting my 'i's.' However . . . the rule is quite simply this: Solicitors and doctors, by reason of their callings, which impose upon us, willy-nilly, an intimacy of a peculiarly personal and often unpleasant character, must be received with formal courtesy upon occasion. But the fact that they are paid as attendants, so to speak, justifies us in keeping them at a discreet distance. Your grandfather used to say: 'How can I enjoy my glass of port when my doctor is watching me drink it, after having strictly forbidden it?' In the same way, although your friend's father, Sir Nathaniel Tiddle, may be an exceptionally worthy person, I should not care to sit at table with him, because he is a pill-manufacturer. How white the world is this morning!"

Cicely bit her lips in the effort to keep silence. Also, she realised the fatuity of further argument. It seemed to her monstrous that anybody, particularly a mother, should not want to sit at table with a man who had spent a long, wearisome night in attendance upon a croupy child. She said, with an inflection of acerbity:

"Yes; but I always think of snow as Nature's whitewash."

"What an idea!"

"Well, it is my idea. I thought this morning that it covered ever so cleverly the rotten leaves which I smelt yesterday. I can't smell them now or see them, but they're there just the same."

Lady Selina eyed her pensively, murmuring:

"Really, child, your liver must be out of order."

VII

During the afternoon Cicely met Grimshaw. Whether by accident or design will never be known. She told her

Digitized by Google

mother, just before Lady Selina was composing herself for a nap, that she intended to pop round the village, but she popped no farther than Mrs. Rockram's. That excellent woman received her with effusion, congratulating the young lady heartily upon her colour. Cicely's cheeks certainly exhibited a deeper damask, and her eyes were sparkling. Mrs. Rockram, honest soul, made no attempt to disguise her interest in what might be happening at Wilverley, and her broad hints and innuendoes nearly drove Cicely from a delightfully warm kitchen. She guessed, of course, that Mrs. Rockram voiced the gossip of the village. Tiddy, she reflected, would have been immensely amused. A Chandos merely achieved exasperation tempered by patience. Nevertheless, she was sensible that Wilverley had become immensely remote, and its lord a mere vibrant blur upon the horizon.

"I didn't come here to talk about Wilverley," she said.

"No, no, suttingly not. But I'm such an old friend, Miss Cicely, so you'll forgive me, won't you? I held you and Master Brian in my arms when you wasn't two hours born. I mind me how Master Brian yowled when he was bathed, and I says to Rockram, I says: 'You mark me, Thomas Rockram, that young man'll never like water'—and he never did."

Cicely laughed.

"You tell me about Upworthy. Is there much sickness?"

"Nothing to worry about. Mr. Grimshaw sees to that, he do. And now that we're a-going to lose him——"

"What——?"

"Haven't you heard, miss?"

"Not a word."

Mrs. Rockram became interjectional. "Well, I never did! —Maybe, I've no call to!—But there!—I did suppose my

Digitized by Google

lady would know!" Boiled down, her tale amounted to no more than this. A certain Dr. Babbington Somebody-or-other had offered Mr. Grimshaw some post in France. Cicely having grasped this as a fact, said:

"And Mr. Grimshaw has accepted the appointment?"

"Well, no, miss. Not to say—accepted. Leastways, he give me to understand only yesterday that he 'adn't answered the letter, but he'll go. Me and Rockram is of the same mind about that."

"But why should he go?"

"Because, dearie, 'e's wanted here. In my long life, I've never known a man to be out o' the way when 'e wasn't wanted, or reely in it when he was. Mr. Grimshaw'll leave us, just because we can't do without him."

Cicely couldn't cope with this. She said, with some tartness:

"Mr. Grimshaw is Dr. Pawley's partner. From my knowledge of him, he's the last man to leave a partner in the lurch."

Whereupon Mrs. Rockram became so interjectional that we cannot attempt to follow her.

Cicely left the cottage, to find Grimshaw snowballing on the Green with some of the village children. He came towards her, laughing, looking, so she thought, like a jolly boy.

"How are you, Miss Chandos?"

Cicely wasted no time.

"What is this story about your leaving us?"

His face became slightly impassive as he replied:

"The good Mrs. Rockram has been indiscreet, I see."

"But—are you going? And where? Do, please, satisfy my curiosity."

"Are you curious?"

"Of course I am."

Digitized by Google

"That's very friendly and kind of you. Yes; I have been offered a rather important billet in a French Field Hospital. Between ourselves, the French Medical Staff were caught napping. It mustn't leak out, but their arrangements have proved wholly inadequate. Doctors and nurses are badly wanted. I happen to speak French fairly well. I took a Paris degree. Babbington-Raikes has written to me——"

"Oh!"

He hesitated, becoming a boy again.

"I—I should really like to know what you think about it."

"How absurd!"

Irritation betrayed itself. Partly because she found herself in a false position. During the previous vigils she had wished to be left alone. Providence, apparently, had granted that wish, so far as Grimshaw was concerned. He would leave Upworthy, never to return. If he cared——! Already, like Arthur Wilverley, he seemed remote. His voice floated to her as from a distance.

"I am sincere. I have talked the matter over with Dr. Pawley. His health is much improved after his long holiday. He can carry on, so he says."

Cicely said shortly:

"Of course he *says* that."

"Do you mean, Miss Chandos, that in your opinion it's my duty to stay here?"

Quite unreasonably—as she admitted to herself afterwards—Cicely became conscious of exasperation. At the moment, naturally enough, she was unable to analyse her emotions. Inasmuch as she wanted Grimshaw to stay for her personal motives, inasmuch also as she knew that such men must be sorely needed elsewhere, his grave question

Digitized by Google

kindled civil war in her own heart. Taken at a disadvantage, she temporised:

"My opinion doesn't count."

"But it does," he assured her.

Man and maid looked at each other with troubled eyes, each dismally conscious of spaces to be bridged, of bristling obstacles to be surmounted. In each, moreover, was the somewhat inchoate conviction that this horrible war imposed itself as paramount. Individuals were engulfed. The best leapt, like Curtius, into the abyss. And dominating this paralysing faith in the necessity of personal sacrifice was the instinct to obey without questioning, to scrap self at any cost. Cicely divined that Grimshaw must do his duty, and that he would do it, ultimately, even if she urged him to stay in Upworthy. To test him, to make certain of his quality, she said slowly, almost with defiance:

"And if I believed that, if—if I gave an opinion—which—which I don't," she hastened to add, "what weight could it have against your own?" As he remained silent, she continued vehemently: "No, no; you will act for yourself. Nothing else is possible."

"I suppose not."

"I venture to guess that you have made up your mind, Mr. Grimshaw."

"Not quite."

Torn within, he presented an impassive face to his interlocutress. His voice seemed to Cicely colder. An older woman would have read him easily. Unhappily, too, for both of them, they were standing on the village green within sight of inquisitive eyes. Alone in Mrs. Rockram's snug parlour, in front of a warming fire, Grimshaw might have spoken and put his fate to the touch. The snow, the grey-white landscape, the approaching shades of evening, chilled speech. But never had Cicely appeared so sweet to him, so

Digitized by Google

desirable. To go from her without a word ravaged him. To speak with entire frankness meant trouble, a burden placed upon slender shoulders. Was it possible to give her a glimpse of his feelings? Could one cold-dispelling ray shoot from his heart to hers before they parted? Physically speaking, hands and feet were growing icy.

She shivered.

Instantly he recognized the inexorable power of environment. He spoke with professional incisiveness:

"I beg your pardon for keeping you here. It is bitterly cold. We are in for a sharp frost."

She held out her hand.

"I return to Wilverley to-morrow." Her voice softened delightfully. "This may be—Good-bye. And if it is, good luck to you."

"Thanks."

With that Cicely sped homeward, a very unhappy maid, leaving an equally unhappy man to his thoughts. Neither had understood the other; each had trodden the well-worn path of convention and good-breeding, no longer that gentle, pleasant exercise so commended and approved by the past generation. Cicely told herself that he didn't care; he was more doctor than man. At the very last he had envisaged her as a possible patient laid low by influenza. . . . Perhaps—her cheeks glowed at the thought—he had guessed something. Deliberately he might be setting the seas between them! Otherwise, surely he would have hinted at a return to Upworthy. . . .

Grimshaw went back to his sitting-room and piled logs upon a dull smouldering heap of cinders. Borrowing Mrs. Rockram's bellows, he blew these into a roaring fire, sat down, lit his pipe, and glared at the leaping flames. He was sensible of failure to his marrow. He accused himself of cowardice. He cross-questioned himself inexorably. Pride

Digitized by Google

had governed him; he had kow-towed to the code imposed by the lady of the manor; he had missed his chance. Lord Wilverley would not miss his chance.

VIII

Alone with her mother, at tea-time, Cicely mentioned casually her visit to Mrs. Rockram and her meeting with Grimshaw upon the village green. Lady Selina nodded with Olympian majesty when she heard of the Babbington-Raikes letter, saying blandly:

"Under the unhappy circumstances, I could not expect Mr. Grimshaw to waste his undoubted talents and energies in Upworthy."

Cicely said hastily:

"He seemed to ask for—for *our* opinion, and of course I replied that he would do what seemed right."

Lady Selina smiled maternally:

"Very proper, my dear. And Dr. Pawley is so much stronger. Really, he doesn't need a partner now."

She sipped her tea, hardly missing the cream. Cicely observed with irrelevance:

"I often wonder why Dr. Pawley never married."

"Ah, well, I could enlighten you, child, about that."

"Do, please!"

Whereupon Lady Selina unfolded a romantic tale with a gusto in the telling of it not wasted upon her listener. Pawley was presented as a young, ardent man, whimsical, attractive, and something of a cavalier. As a rider to hounds, he had won the friendship of the late Squire of Upworthy. Cicely was well aware of this, a fact that tickled her humour. With a full appreciation of the part played by fox-hunting in the making of the nation, she learnt also, not with surprise, that a bold horseman had capti-

Digitized by Google

vated the interest of a daughter of the county, now a rotund matron, the wife of a baronet who lived a dozen miles away. Lady Selina was describing vividly, with corroborative detail, the process of transmuting mere interest into love, when Cicely interjected rather sharply:

"I understand—the affair was nipped."

Lady Selina hated interruptions.

"Don't nip me, my dear. What happened can be put adequately without using slang. Common sense prevailed. Your dear father, indeed, had a finger in the pie. . . ."

"Pressure!" exclaimed the young lady. "I should have thought," she added, "that Dr. Pawley would not have yielded to pressure."

"Which shows, my dear, that you don't know him. At any rate, he did the wise and honourable thing. None of us, high or low, can afford to ignore public opinion. In this case, everything turned out for the best. Dr. Pawley's straightforward conduct served to establish his position. When the facts became known, the best houses opened their doors to him."

"But he lost a partner."

"That loss turned into a substantial gain. I have often thought that celebacy is best for doctors and clergymen. If they marry, they should choose helpmeets. But I can understand, also, that such a man as my dear old friend, having loved truly a young lady of quality—she had very great charm and distinction, I can assure you—would not care to look elsewhere. And here again his fidelity to an ideal has endeared him to all of us."

Lady Selina sighed. Cicely murmured pensively:

"I wonder what Tiddy would say."

"I can imagine what your friend would say, Cicely, and I am glad that she is not here to say it. *Noblesse oblige*

Digitized by Google

happens to be a phrase which the daughter of Sir Nathaniel Tiddle couldn't be expected to understand."

"She understands it right enough, and she's jolly glad that it doesn't apply to her. In ten days she comes to Wilverley."

"Really!"

Lady Selina looked down her nose, and the shape of it may have encouraged her to remark:

"You know, child, that this friendship of yours with a rather unrestrained and undisciplined young woman is a certain anxiety to me. However . . .!"

With a gesture that might have become the mother of the Gracchi, Lady Selina dismissed Miss Tiddle.

But, till Cicely returned to duty the girl was lapped in tenderness and solicitude. Let no man assume too hastily that design lurked beneath soft glances and rare caresses. At any moment a few pencilled words upon a telegram might apprise Lady Selina of the loss of a son. Because such fear impended, she clutched desperately at her daughter, striving to hold in her masterful grasp the essential possession, strangely conscious that the spirit eluded her, that flesh and blood obscured the real Cicely. It was hardly credible that her girl did not think as she did upon matters supremely affecting conduct. Yet she dared not break down virginal reserves with direct questions. And she could remember that between herself and her mother there had been the same queer intermittencies of sympathy, the thus-far-and-no-farther limit that blighted full-blooming confidence.

You may be sure that she rejoiced unaffectedly at Grimshaw's departure from Upworthy, meaning to speed him on his way with gracious smiles, hoping and praying that he would never return. During the five minutes that she devoted each night to prayer and introspection, she decided that Providence had deigned to stretch forth a delivering

Digitized by Google

Hand. With fervent faith she beheld clearly the Divine Intention.

Cicely had not inherited this clarity of vision.

She went back to Wilverley a much-bewildered maid, almost at the mercy of circumstances and surroundings, feeling strangely invertebrate and listless. For the moment we may compare her to a cog on a machine. Being a true Chandos she intended to do her work efficiently. That would suffice till—till Tiddy came. Tiddy would revitalise her. Meanwhile, she contemplated with some dismay the certainty of talk not with but from the tremendous Mrs. Roden.

That good lady eyed her critically.

"Too much Christmas," she said trenchantly.

Out of sight and hearing of her august mother, Cicely often amused herself by understudying Tiddy. So she replied calmly:

"Yes; I overrate myself. Plum-pudding *and* mince-pies. What can you expect when a poor girl is hungry and greedy?"

Mrs. Roden smiled grimly. Cicely's spirit did not displease her. The one thing needful in a world to be regenerated by WOMAN was spirit.

"We missed you, my dear. Arthur was quite depressed. How is your mother?"

"Just the same."

"Wonderful woman! The world is in the melting-pot, but she doesn't change. Sometimes I envy her. Amazing powers of detachment."

"And attachment. She was sweet to me, Mrs. Roden. I—I hated to leave her alone in that big house."

"You know that you are wanted here."

As if this statement exacted emphasis, Wilverley came in, unmistakably joyous, holding out two hands. And he

Digitized by Google

happened to be looking his best in riding-kit, exuding energy and goodwill, so delighted to see Cicely that his genial tones betrayed him as lover and would-be conqueror. She felt herself whirled away upon a flood of eager questions, which taken collectively embodied the supreme question. Mrs. Roden tactfully retired.

"He is going to propose now," though Cicely. "How can I prevent him?"

They were in the big library filled with superbly-bound tomes that were never read, bought wholesale, with true decorative instinct, by the first Lord Wilverley. Opulence characterised the room from floor to ceiling. Cicely sank into the carpet and into an arm-chair, almost overpowered by the sense of luxury and comfort. A violent temptation assailed her. Why not float with the current instead of against it? The excitement of any change from apathetic and dull conditions beguiled her. All of us know how the Great War engendered excitement. Possibly women were more susceptible to a craving for action than men. Action was forced upon men.

She heard Wilverley's sincere voice repeating what his sister had affirmed, but with an emphasis not to be denied.

"I have missed you horribly."

"But you hardly ever saw me."

"You were here, in my house. When you left it seemed empty to me. Now that you have come back——!"

He broke off abruptly, waiting, perhaps, for some encouraging glance. Cicely stared at the carpet. Her cheeks were slightly flushed. Although she wished to procrastinate, she was sensible that this big man, so close to her, so alive with energy, was presenting himself insistently. A strong mind was modifying and reconstructing hers. All that he represented seemed to force itself upon her notice. If he won her, she would be regarded as his most precious

Digitized by Google

possession. He stood, first and last, for—*Security*. The time and attention that he gave to the humblest of his dependents would be hers inalienably. He would be faithful and true to his marriage vows. She would be enshrined in a velvet-lined casket.

Safe harbourage!

How much it means to women! And particularly to women of imaginative temperament, who, like homing birds, are gifted with the sense of direction. Cicely's imagination had carried her afield. In Miss Tiddle's agreeable company she had explored highways and byways, wandering down the latter with the comforting reflection that she could leave them at a moment's notice. Girls who indulge in such mental vagabondage are more likely to return to the highways than the unimaginative, who may fly the beaten track suddenly. With Miss Tiddle Cicely had dared to enter (metaphorically) the Divorce Court; she had flown upon imaginative wings into drawing-rooms where Mrs. Grundy refuses to go, where derelict wives bewail their mistake in marrying the wrong men.

To such a girl as Cicely the broad high road appears to be the only way. All the women of kin to her, with one notable exception, had stuck religiously to the main thoroughfare which stretches from Mayfair to John o' Groat's. And these kinswomen, taking them by and large, appeared to be happy and contented. The notable exception, who was never mentioned, remained an unseen object lesson of how not to do it!

Wilverley went on:

"The loneliness of a big house is rather disconcerting, Cis."

He had never called her "Cis."

"Even when it is a hospital?" she asked.

"The strange faces make it the more so. You must have

Digitized by Google

noticed lately that I have talked a lot about myself. I wanted you to know me. I want desperately to know you, but somehow you are not very self-revealing."

"Is anybody?"

If she could divert the talk into an impersonal channel procrastination might be achieved. Wilverley refused the bait.

"I have tried to be so to you. Tell me, Cis, do you see me as I am, a plain enough fellow who wishes with all his heart that he was more attractive?"

"I think I see you," she admitted, after an instant's hesitation.

"I have not studied the arts that please women."

His modesty was so disarming that her face relaxed. She replied frankly:

"Really and truly I distrust those arts."

Such kindliness informed her voice that he plunged.

"You are going back to your drudgery tonight. And I am up to my eyes in work also. So forgive me if I beat no bushes. You are too clever not to know what I want. Will you be my wife?"

"I—I don't know," she faltered.

His face fell, but he recovered quickly. He muttered disconsolately:

"What a muddle I've made of this!" And then a happy inspiration came to his rescue. He said awkwardly: "You see, dearest, it's a first attempt, but you encourage me to hope that it may not be the last. May I try again?"

Cicely said desperately:

"I do feel such a fool. I—I don't know my own mind, Arthur. It's humiliating to say so."

"Nothing of the sort. Let us mark time. I believe I fell in love with you when you were a tiny. Perhaps you will

Digitized by Google

laugh at me when I tell you that I sneaked a hanky of yours before you put your hair up."

"Arthur! . . . I hope it was a nice one. Did—did you have to send it to the wash?"

"Oh, no," he reassured her.

They laughed, and the strain was over. Perhaps—who can say?—an experienced courtier might have achieved less. Henceforward Cicely beheld Wilverley in a more romantic light.

"When I try again," he said shyly, "I shall show you the hanky."

"I am like my hankies," Cicely replied, "more ornamental than useful."

Soon afterwards she went upstairs to the room which she was to share with Miss Tiddle. As she put on her uniform she thought to herself:

"I wonder what Tiddy will think of him."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER V

TIDDY APPEARS

I

TIDDY can best be described by the word *"éveillée,"* which cannot be translated exactly into English. "Alert" comes near it. "Wideawake" is not wide of the mark. Sir Nathaniel Tiddle's daughter possessed shrewd brains, but little beauty. Being well aware of this, she made the most of what was likely to challenge interest and admiration. She cocked a pert little head at an unusual angle and flaunted short, crisp curls, which she shook in the face of Authority. The curls remained curly even after immersion in sea-water. Shampooed they became irrepressibly alive. Tiddy reckoned her curls to be a great asset. She awarded second place to her eyes, large, round, saucer-eyes, neither grey nor green nor blue, something of all three, fringed by short, thick, dark lashes, very provocative, and even more interrogative. They seemed to say: "I want to know everything about everybody." Of her complexion (which was sallow), of her nose (which was pug), of her large mouth, let us say no more. Her teeth were small, white and even. Her figure lent itself to all vagaries of fashion, being slender but not thin. She could pass as a jolly boy without fear of her sex being detected. And she had in full measure a boy's agility and lissomness.

Mentally, too, she had a healthy boy's outlook, although emotionally feminine. Joy in life radiated from her. Dames

Digitized by Google

of Lady Selina's quality might (and did) stigmatise this as pagan. Long ago, Miss Spong had rebuked her for dancing or prancing to church. But, despite rebuke, she had gone on dancing, conscious, possibly, of slim ankles and high insteps.

Tiddy being an only child, it might be reasonably inferred that she was spoilt by adoring parents. Nothing of the kind. Sir Nathaniel had become a millionaire by the exercise of brains and indomitable will. Tiddy's mother, as we have said, began womanhood in a shoe factory. Both Sir Nathaniel and she were excellent types of the successful industrial class in this nation. The beacon which had led them upwards and onwards was undiluted common sense. Sir Nathaniel had his weaknesses—what great man is without them?—pride in what he had accomplished, pardonable vanity, an ambition that vaulted as high as the Upper House, and an ever-increasing desire to play the part of a magnate. But he remained, like his wife, sound and simple at core. He had never, for example, turned his back upon relations who had not soared. He was of the people, and much too fond of saying so. Tiddy had inherited from him democratic instincts. And if, with accumulating riches, Sir Nathaniel had become, as his daughter hinted, conservative in regard to property, he never faltered in his allegiance to the class from which he had sprung. His great factories were models of organisation and administration. He boasted that no strikes had taken place in them. Possibly his greatest pleasure in life was taking appreciative guests—particularly personages—round his factories, and, in their presence receiving the homage of pleasant smiles and grateful words from his employés. It was after such an agreeable excursion that the honour of knighthood had been bestowed.

Digitized by Google

II

Tiddy duly arrived at Wilverley, and that night Cicely and she sat up talking till the small hours. As a rule, the nursing staff took their meals together. Mrs. Roden and Wilverley dined apart. But, inasmuch as Tiddy was Cicely's friend, the two V.A.D.s were asked to square the family circle at dinner. Tiddy would join the staff on the following morning.

Cicely was amused to see that she made an immense impression both upon Wilverley and his sister, asking innumerable questions, all of them to the point, and describing her experiences in a big Red Cross Hospital in the Midlands, not run upon model lines.

"Friction everywhere," declared Tiddy. "Matron on bad terms with sisters and nurses, favouritism——"

"Were you a favourite, Miss Tiddle?" asked Wilverley, much amused.

"Yes," replied Tiddy. "As a martyr I might have stuck it, but just because Daddy weighed in with big cheques they were much too civil to me, and I loathed it. That's why I'm here to-night," she concluded with a gay laugh.

"Pray go on," entreated Mrs. Roden. "This is most instructive. We may profit by your experiences, my dear young lady."

"As to that," said Tidd frankly, "I should keep mum, if I didn't know from Cis that things are humming along here on the right lines. The poor duchess meant well——"

"The duchess . . .?" interrogated Mrs. Roden. To Mrs. Roden a duchess was not quite as other women.

"The Duchess of Mowbray. I thought you knew that I had been working at Harborough Castle."

"She was a D'Arcy," murmured Mrs. Roden. "I never speak ill of others or repeat ill-natured gossip. Still . . ."

Digitized by Google

"Please make an exception in this case, my dear Mary," said Wilverley. Cicely could see that his eyes twinkled. Certainly this rather stodgy man had an elementary sense of humour. But you had to dig deep to find it.

Mrs. Roden said solemnly:

"Her mother was a Dollope. We all know that the Dollopes are . . . well . . . Dollopes . . .!"

"They would be with such a name," Tiddy observed.

Mrs. Roden continued trenchantly:

"Old Lord D'Arcy was quite impossible. One couldn't repeat what he did or said."

"Tell me all about him afterwards," said Wilverley.

"I am serious, Arthur. Lord D'Arcy was a moral idiot, first and last a crutch man, leaning on others. No sense of responsibility whatever. I could tell you stories . . .!"

"But you won't, Mary. That is so exasperating. However, let him rest in peace!"

"In peace——? I should be false to my faith in the here and the hereafter, if I let pass such a remark. Lord D'Arcy, wherever he may be, is not in peace. But I thought —possibly I am mistaken—that the duchess was in France."

Tiddy answered promptly:

"She is. She ought to be at home. What has happened? The patients and the servants—oh, those servants!!—get top-hole rations. The nursing-staff were half-starved."

"Dear, dear!" ejaculated Mrs. Roden. She looked shocked, but she felt somehow rather pleased. The Duchess of Mowbray, before the war, had overlooked Mrs. Roden's claims to consideration upon more than one occasion. Cicely, not too sharp in such matters, guessed that Tiddy was "making good."

"Yes," continued Tiddy cheerfully; "the duchess, you see, arranged with some contractor to feed us, and of course he didn't."

Digitized by Google

"I give undivided attention to these important matters," said Mrs. Roden.

"I know you do," said Tiddy.

Presently, the talk drifted into Wilverley's particular channel. Tiddy listened to him attentively, chipping in, now and again, with apposite remarks that astonished Cicely. Altogether, this first meeting was a small triumph for Miss Tiddle.

"They like you, Tiddy," said Cicely, as the pair warmed their toes over the bedroom fire.

"I like them, Cis. Mrs. Roden frightens you, I see, but you were right: she's a scream. I must pull up my socks, and take her as seriously as she takes herself. Lord Wilverley is not quite the bromide you had led me to expect."

"I never said a word against him."

"Oh! Didn't you? Evidently he's dead nuts on you. Has he proposed, old thing?"

Cicely blushingly admitted that my lord had plunged into water too hot for both of them. Tiddy went on ruthlessly:

"And Romeo with the disconcerting eyes . . .?"

"Shut up!"

"I couldn't, if I tried. Let's have it fresh from the oven."

Cicely, after more pressure, gave a not too articulate version of what had passed between Grimshaw and herself. Tiddy listened, with her head on one side, bright-eyed, not unlike a robin watching another robin picking up crumbs. From time to time, she shook her curls impatiently, but she held her tongue till Cicely finished.

Then Miss Tiddle delivered judgment with all the wisdom of youth.

"It seems to me, Cis, that silence has extinguished you."

Cicely admitted as much proudly.

"We Chandoses are like that."

"We Chandoses——!" Tiddy laughed scornfully. "Cut

Digitized by Google

all that cackle with me, Cis. I have the greatest contempt for silence. Generally it means stupidity. Idiots say nothing and are proud of it. Really, I'm ashamed of you. However, I daresay I've nipped in in time."

"In time for—what?"

"To put things right. I want to meet your Harry."

"*My* Harry! What an idea!"

Tiddy said obstinately: "We Tiddles are like that. We don't look blandly on when babies are playing on the edge of a precipice. I say that you love Romy; and that Romy loves you. And that hateful Mrs. Grundy stands between you." Cicely exercised the Chandos gift of silence. Tiddy continued warmly: "You may take Fatty out of pique."

"Fatty——!"

"I used that word to annoy you, to rouse you. You are quite likely to become fat yourself out of sheer indolence. Some of you swells have brains, but you don't use 'em. And if you don't get a move on, you'll be down and out."

Cicely murmured deprecatingly:

"Arthur Wilverley is a dear."

"So is our butler at home. I might do worse than marry him, but I hope to do better."

"You won't meet Mr. Grimshaw, Tiddy, because he's going to France."

"Settled, is it?"

"Yes. He—he"—her voice faltered—"went away yesterday, so dear Mother wrote."

"So dear Mother wrote . . .! I'll bet my boots that dear Mother managed all this."

"She didn't."

"Anyhow, you mismanaged it. Well, if Romy cares he'll come back."

"Do you think he will?"

"*If he cares.*"

Digitized by Google

Tiddy Appears

III

For some weeks nothing of interest happened at Wilverley Court. Cicely, perhaps, was slightly disconcerted because, as a V.A.D., Miss Tiddle, a new-comer, soared above her. Cicely remained a drudge; Tiddy was accorded privileges. One of the patients required a special nurse. No sister could be spared. Tiddy, by virtue of an alert physiognomy, was selected by "Matron" out of a dozen eager aspirants for the post. And poor Cicely gnashed her teeth when she found herself "clearing up," as it is technically called, after Miss Tiddle's more congenial labours. To remove, humbly and swiftly, the impedimenta of a sick-room, leaving behind the immaculate Tiddy enthroned beside an interesting case, tried Cicely to breaking point. Indeed, a too long apprenticeship to drudgery failed to accustom a daughter of the ancient House of Chandos to carrying away soiled dressings, washing bandages, and cleaning dressing-buckets with Monkey soap, which roughens hands, takes the polish from nails, and brightens everything except the temper. And, after two hours' sweeping and garnishing, it was mortifying to proud flesh to hear judgment pronounced by a sister, who was the daughter of a greengrocer: "This ward looks like nothing on earth." After such experiences and exercises Cicely was quite unable to tackle with appetite the good food provided by Mrs. Roden at lunch.

She went to Wilverley Court aflame with patriotic ardour and brimming over with excellent resolutions, assuring and reassuring herself that, much as she might shrink from the sight of ugly wounds and cruel sufferings, never, never would she exhibit irritability or impatience with heroes who had bled for England. She had imagined that such heroes would remain heroes. She had not realised the inconsider-

Digitized by Google

ation, the disobedience, the fractious unreasonableness that even a Victoria Cross may fail to hide when its wearer is reduced by long weeks of pain to a mere attenuated shadow of his true self.

But—there were illuminating compensations. One afternoon, she was returning late from the village, through a dark lane. To her dismay, a man in khaki joined her and passed her without a word. He walked just ahead of her. Every minute Cicely feared that he would turn and confront her with—with abominable effrontery. At the end of the dark lane, when the lights of Wilverley Court were in sight, he did turn, and saluted her, saying respectfully: "Good night, Sister." Then he retraced his steps—a *preux chevalier!*

Other experiences were equally illuminating. One of the patients, an unusually handsome man, died after much suffering patiently endured. At the last his wife was summoned, a respectable, plain-faced woman, who was with him when he passed away. The man's kit was duly given to her. Late that same night, the Matron found her crying over some letters she had discovered, written by another woman. Next day, early in the morning, a good-looking, slightly brazen-faced young person presented herself and asked to see the patient, not knowing that he was dead. The Matron told her the truth. Whereupon she said calmly: "I'm his wife. I want to see him." The Matron, aghast, blurted out the truth: "His wife? His lawful wife is here. We know that; we sent for her." Whereupon, the other replied quite coolly: "If you want to know, I ain't his lawful wife, but I mean to see him all the same." The Matron went to the genuine widow, and told her that the woman who had written the letters wished to see the dead man. She asked the crucial question: "Are you big enough to let this poor creature see him? She loved him." To

Digitized by Google

cut short a poignant story, the two women went together into the mortuary-chamber. This incident made a profound impression upon Tiddy. She analysed it from every point of view. "If we grant," said she, "that a man can love two women"—because, according to Matron, the real wife had spoken of her husband's devotion—"is it equally certain that a woman can love two men?" Cicely shrank from answering such a question. Tiddy had astonished her by saying: "I believe it is possible. Why not? One man might appeal physically; the other intellectually."

"Horrible!" said Cicely.

"You can't compromise with life by calling it bad names."

Cicely remained obstinately silent much to Miss Tiddle's exasperation.

Often Cicely went to bed with a headache and rose with it. To go on duty feeling unfit, to contemplate ten hours of physical *malaise,* to count the lagging minutes, to confront the pettiness and injustice of some sister, perhaps, who held amateurs in contempt, to be conscious that she was not rising adequately to these moral exigencies, to retire at length discomfited and defeated, has been the experience of all V.A.D.s. Cicely was no exception.

One night Tiddy found her in tears.

"What a soaker!" said Tiddy.

"I'm so miserable," groaned Cicely.

"Why?"

"I'm such a failure, Tiddy."

"Tosh! The real trouble with you, Cis, is excess of sentiment. You look at my patient, for instance, with sweet girlish pity. He hates that. He doesn't want sweet girlish pity. Smiles buck him up, and strong language."

"I thought I could count on your sympathy."

Digitized by Google

"So did my patient. Sympathy can be shown without being sloppy. I made my patient laugh."

"How?"

"I told him about the old woman who keeps our lodge. She left one doctor and went to another, but, being a bit of a pincher, she went on taking the medicine of the first with the medicine of the second, and a sort of earthquake took place inside her."

Cicely was beyond laughter, but she dabbed at her eyes. Tiddy continued:

"I know what upsets you, Cis. You have to do some of my old work; and they rag you a bit downstairs. And then you don't rag back, but glump. You are glumping now."

"I'm not. I suppose we're different."

"That's your misfortune, not mine. I refuse to weep with you. 'Weep, and you weep alone.' Good old Ella got there with both feet."

Cicely smiled faintly.

In due time Tiddy returned to the normal duties of a V.A.D.

Meanwhile Arthur Wilverley had been absent from home. He came back in March, burdened with fresh duties and lamenting the loss of his secretary, who had joined up.

"What I want," he said to Cicely, "is a clever girl who can do typing and shorthand, and come and go when I want her. But she must have a head on her shoulders."

A name flew into Cicely's mind and out of her mouth.

"Agatha Farleigh."

If Agatha could be found, Cicely was sure that she would prove the real right thing. Of course the Extons would know. Old Ephraim Exton had not waited a year to leave his farm. He was now a tenant of Wilverley, and likely to do well, breeding cattle and horses under happier conditions. His son, John, had enlisted. Cicely, anxious to

Digitized by Google

serve a kind host, cycled next day, during off-time, to Exton's farm, obtained from the old man Agatha's address in London, and then, at Wilverley's request, wrote to her at length, setting forth all details of duties, salary and so forth. Agatha wired back promptly from a typewriting establishment in the Strand, accepting the situation. Within a week she was at work in Wilverley's office. Within a fortnight Wilverley acclaimed Agatha as a gem of purest ray serene.

He told Cicely, whenever they met (not too often), details about his work. The mandarins had just begun to recognise the possibility of famine. Wilverley, as an expert on agriculture, had been summoned and impressed, without salary, into the Government service. To grow two bushels of wheat where one grew in pre-war days engrossed his activities. To persuade others to tread in his steps had become—so Cicely noticed—a sort of obsession. No word of love slipped from his lips. And a Chandos respected this silence. But, inevitably, the girl came to full understanding of what work meant to Wilverley and others. Comparisons were forced upon her. Inevitably, also, during her leisure, intimacy developed between Agatha and her. Work in London had changed Agatha from a girl into a woman. Her wits and tongue had been sharpened upon the whetstone Competition. Cicely soon discovered that Agatha had discarded reserves of speech imposed upon villagers. She had become, perhaps, less of an individual and more of a type. She showed this in her clothes, and in her talk. Obviously she preened herself after the fashion of up-to-date typists and stenographers, acutely sensible of the cash value of appearances. On the first Sunday at Wilverley Church she wore a cony-seal coat and a hat that distracted the attention of every young woman who was not "quality." Under the coat waggled a shepherd's-plaid skirt,

Digitized by Google

cut very short, exposing imitation-silk stockings and high fawn-coloured cloth-topped boots, which, so Cicely suspected, were not too large for her feet. Conscious of Cicely's amused smile, Agatha assumed a defiant expression, as much as to say: "If you don't like my costume I'm sorry for you. It's quite the latest style, and paid for. Not by a rich mother, but by a hard-working, independent girl." Cicely, greeting Agatha in the churchyard, observed without malice:

"I say, Agatha, you must have saved a bit in London."

To this Agatha replied sharply, imputing censure:

"What I saved I spent. And why not?"

Perceiving that she had provoked resentment, Cicely hastened to assuage it.

"Why not?" she echoed. "I never was able to save a farthing out of my allowance."

"We grow old and ugly soon enough," said Agatha, in a softened tone. "I oughtn't to have bought this coat, but that's why I did it."

Cicely's laugh melted the little ice that remained. And Agatha's gratitude for the word spoken to Wilverley was whole hearted. She said shyly:

"I wanted to come back to be near my own people and —and the Extons."

As she spoke, she pulled off a white glove with black stitching and revealed a ring sparkling upon the third finger of her left hand. Cicely saw a small cluster of diamonds, a ring that she might have worn herself.

"John Exton gave me this before he joined up."

Cicely kissed her.

"I'm ever so glad. Tell me all about it."

Agatha, nothing loath, remarked with urban complacency:

"I do believe that prinking did it. I was a terrible dowd before I went to town. Those everlasting greys . . .! My

Digitized by Google

lady liked that. So suitable . . .! We girls talked a lot about clothes."

"I always wondered what you did talk about."

"I was ragged—a fair treat. I had to grin and bear it. Well, what was in the Savings Bank came out of it—quick. In six months I didn't know myself. When John came up and saw me, I knew that I hadn't been the fool I secretly thought myself. It's gospel truth; girls like me must march with the band, or—or be left behind."

"I don't blame you or John," declared Cicely.

Agatha continued in the same slightly complacent tone, which jarred upon Lady Selina's daughter, although it served to amuse and instruct her. Her soft, respectful manner of address had evidently been cast as rubbish to the void. Cicely divined that she had become something of an echo.

"We girls must have a good time when we're young, or do without for ever and ever, amen! And as to catching the men, why, I suppose Bernard Shaw knows what he's talking about."

"Man and Superman, eh?"

"Yes."

Under some little pressure from Cicely, Agatha, with unabashed candour, and without picking her phrases, set forth her experiences in London "on her own." Cicely was informed that girls of the wage-earning class who want husbands must make the most of their opportunities before they reach thirty, or find themselves stranded on the bleak shores of celibacy, with a glimpse of the workhouse in the far distance.

"They do fight like animals for a good time," said Agatha.

Then, to Cicely's amazement, this protégée of her mother's opened a smart Dorothy bag, examined her nose in a tiny mirror, and proceeded calmly to powder it. Cicely

Digitized by Google

thought that she looked thinner, and wondered if the colour on the girl's cheeks came out of the Dorothy bag.

"Have you lost weight, Agatha?" she asked.

"Well, we do skimp food to buy clothes, but we're greedy enough when somebody else pays for our meals."

After this unabashed talk, Cicely admitted consternation to Tiddy, who gibed at her.

"I never saw such a change in a girl."

"Pooh! We don't change much. What was in her came out. She seizes joy when it passes her way. No exception at all. I see you don't talk much with the other V.A.D.s. Silly—that! Take my tip, and study people at first-hand. I do. I want to understand everybody. Of course, as we're pals, I dissemble a wee bit with your mother. Perhaps if she understood me I should be out of bounds to you."

Acting upon this advice, Cicely became more friendly with the farmers' and tradesmen's daughters now working at Wilverley Court. Most of them called her "Shandy." She had accepted this cheerfully, because such familiarity would end, she reflected, with the war. Now, she was beginning to wonder whether social distinctions were of paramount importance. Freedom of intercourse, according to Tiddy, begetting a truer sympathy, a kindlier understanding, might be a greater thing than respectful salutations. In the Midlands, children neither curtsied nor touched caps. Lamentable . . .! She was glad that she didn't live there.

The V.A.D.s responded to Cicely's advances. She found in them what she had found in Agatha: pluck, fortitude and an invincible optimism in regard to big things. They whined and wailed over trifles. They lacked restraint, refinement, and lied magnificently to achieve their ends. Tiddy talked to all and sundry, particularly the sundry. She didn't invite confidence timidly, like Cicely. She exacted and ex-

Digitized by Google

tracted it, waving it triumphantly, as a dentist will hold aloft a big molar. With the august Mrs. Roden Tiddy shared the conviction that women were coming into their promised land. Agatha agreed with Miss Tiddle. Often Cicely found herself in a minority of one when social questions were debated at meal-time.

"Is nothing sacred to you?" she asked Tiddy.

"Oh, yes, but not tin gods. This war will scrap them for ever and ever. Speed up."

"Pace kills, Tiddy."

"Tosh! Pace kills those who won't get out of the way. Tin gods sat in a row, graven images, obstructing progress. We shall knock 'em down like ninepins. It's a case of knock or be knocked. You've come on a lot. I wonder what your mother thinks of you."

Whereupon Cicely confessed that she too dissembled with Lady Selina. At this Tiddy shrugged disdainful shoulders.

"I should have thought you were sick of whitewash in your village."

"Whitewash? Mr. Grimshaw called it that."

"Yes; he was the first to open your baby eyes."

"Well, there's no whitewash here."

"Wrong again. Whitewash and eyewash. A full dose yesterday."

Upon the previous afternoon, the Wilverley Court Red Cross Hospital had been inspected by a medical Panjandrum. Wards and passages had been swept and garnished with nauseating haste and diligence. A great house, already in fine working order, had been scrubbed from basement to attics. The tired scrubbers had presented smiling faces and spotless uniforms to the cold stare of red-tabbed Authority. After his departure they had retired—foundered!

"What's the use of that?" asked Tiddy. "Why can't

Digitized by Google

these pestering old duffers take us unawares, and find out how things really are? We should have gloried in that test. At Harborough we played the same rotten game. For half-an-hour the place was as it ought to have been. Next day we went back to the old disorder and dirt. However, we women are going to change all that."

"Changes are so upsetting, Tiddy."

"I repeat—knock or be knocked. Really, you privileged people can't complain; you've had a wonderful innings. But this war has bowled you out."

"Mother would have a fit if she heard you," remarked Cicely.

IV

Afterwards, long afterwards, Cicely could not recall with any exactness when she began to look at Upworthy with eyes from which the scales had fallen. Presently she beheld the beloved cottages through Miss Tiddle's twinkling orbs. Little escaped them. Called upon to admire thatched roofs and walls brilliantly white against a background of emerald-green fields, Tiddy perpetrated sniffs.

Cicely said defiantly:

"They're the prettiest cottages in the county."

"In our cottages, Cis, Daddy and I look at the kiddies. If they're all right, we're satisfied."

"Satisfied with rows of ugly brick houses with slate tiles . . .?"

"Absolutely."

"What's the matter with our children?" asked Cicely.

Tiddy replied with imperturbable and exasperating good humour:

"You must find that out for yourself, old thing. It's no use jawing at people. That only makes 'em the more obstinate. Sooner or later, if you keep your peepers peeled,

Digitized by Google

you'll catch on. I'm wondering just how long you will keep it up."

"Keep what up?"

"Self-deception—humbugging your own powers of observation."

Coming and going to the Manor, when off duty, the girls would drop into the cottages and pass the time of day with smiling and obsequious villagers. But their pleasant greetings failed to impress Sir Nathaniel's daughter. It happened, shortly after Agatha's arrival, that Cicely paid a visit to Timothy Farleigh, the typist's uncle. Before she tapped on the door, Cicely spoke a word of warning to Miss Tiddle.

"I want to tell Timothy how well Agatha is doing, but . . ."

"Yes?"

"Well, the old fellow has a grievance. Mrs. Farleigh is a dear. And you will admire the kitchen."

They tapped and entered. Tiddy was agreeably surprised and delighted. The kitchen was charming; a quaint, old-fashioned room with a deep open hearth and ingle nook. A broad seat semi-circled a deeply-recessed bay window, and above the seat was a ledge with flower-pots upon it. An oak dresser set forth to advantage some blue-and-white pottery. Hams hung from a big black rafter. Upon the walls gleamed an immense brass warming-pan and a brass preserving-dish which seemed to have survived the use and abuse of centuries. A large table was scrubbed immaculately white. There were plain Windsor chairs and a huge arm-chair facing the hearth. In this arm-chair sat Timothy Farleigh, reading a Sunday paper with horn spectacles upon his bony nose. He rose when the young ladies entered, and greeted them civilly but without the customary servility. In

Digitized by Google

the ingle-nook Nick, the softy, was crouching, crooning to himself.

Timothy thanked Cicely for bringing him information about his niece. Tiddy eyed him critically noting his strong square chin, heavy brow and deep-set eyes. A curious light smouldered in them. He spoke in the West Country dialect still used in remote districts by the elder generation.

"Aggie be a fine young 'ooman, able, thank the Lard! to fend for herself. I be proud o' she, a gert, understandin' lass I calls 'er."

"I have brought my friend, Miss Tiddle, to see you, Timothy. She comes from the Midlands, where folk are thick as bees in a hive."

Timothy glanced with interest at Tiddy.

"Do they bide quiet in their hives, miss? I bain't much of a scollard, but I reads my Sunday paper, I do, and folks in your parts seemin'ly be buzzin' and swarmin' like bees ready to leave old hive."

"There is a good deal of that," admitted Tiddy candidly.

"Ah-h-h!"

Timothy pressed his thin lips, as if fearing that buzzing might escape from him. He shrugged his heavy shoulders, warped by constant toil in the fields, and remained silent. Just then his wife bustled in, a frail, spindling little woman with worried eyes. She greeted Cicely, so Tiddy noticed, with genuine affection, and offered instantly a cup of tea. Her obvious desire to ingratiate herself with the quality seemed pathetic to the young woman from the Midlands.

"Stop your noise, Nicky," said Mrs. Farleigh sharply. "You knows better nor that."

"Let 'un bide," growled Timothy.

Nick stared and then grinned at Miss Tiddle, offering slyly his customary greeting to strangers.

"I be soft, I be."

Digitized by Google

"Don't 'ee take no notice of him, miss."

Cicely talked on cheerfully about Agatha till it was time to go. Outside Tiddy said sharply:

"What is this grievance?"

Reluctantly, Cicely told the tale of diphtheria and two graves in the churchyard. Tiddy refrained from comment. Crossing the village green, after five minutes with Mrs. Rockram, they encountered Nicodemus Burble, hearty and garrulous as ever.

"It do tickle me to death to see 'ee, miss," he assured Cicely. "A fair stranger you be."

"How is everything in the village, granfer?"

"We be gettin' older, miss, and more rheumaticky. But I keeps on my old pins, I does, being scairt o' takin' to my bed wi' no 'ooman to fend for me."

"An old bachelor?" asked Tiddy.

"Lard love 'ee, miss, I ha' buried two wives, and might ha' taken a third, a very praper young wench, but too free wi' her tongue like."

"Was she?" asked Tiddy.

"Aye. Whatever do 'ee think she says to me, the lil' besom, when I up and axed her to be number three?"

"I can't imagine," said Cicely.

Tiddy observed thoughtfully:

"She might have said a good deal."

The ancient chuckled.

"'Granfer,' she says, "' a man o' your gert age ought to go to bed wi' a candlestick.' "

Cicely threw back her head and laughed. Tiddy wanted more detail.

"And what did you reply to that, Mr. Burble?"

"Ah-h-h! I was too flambergasted, miss, for common speech, but a very notable answer blowed into my yed just

Digitized by Google

one fornit arter. I can't go to bed wi' a candlestick, acause I ain't got none, nary one."

He hobbled on, still chuckling.

"They're quite wonderful," said Tiddy. "Prehistoric. How long will it last?"

Cicely frowned, anticipating criticism.

"I suppose you would like to see everything cut to pattern, with the colour out of the pattern, a drab monotony of millions doing and saying the same thing; no distinctions, no differences—ugh?"

"Is that your own, Cis?"

Cicely had to admit that she was quoting from the *Morning Post.*

Tiddy laughed at her, as usual.

"You Tories are always so extreme. Changes needn't be violent, but they may be violent if you swells don't climb down the pole a bit and get nearer facts as they are. That's all. What a very horrid smell!"

Under the stronger beams of a May sun odours of pig were wafted on the breeze.

"I don't mind the smell of pigs."

"Does your mother ever notice it?"

"I don't know."

"If she kept away from her village I should understand, but she doesn't."

Cicely was sharp enough to explain.

"That's it. If she kept away . . .! Then she might notice. She has smelt these smells for thirty years. She says that a smell you can smell is not dangerous. Brian thinks just as she does."

"France may take some dust out of his eyes."

Retrenchment, expenses cut to the irreducible Saltaire minimum, was inscribed upon gates, fences, and buildings. Cicely had an illuminating word to say about the gates:

Digitized by Google

"Father said that he liked a gate that you could put a young horse at without running much risk of breaking your neck."

"What a humane man!"

Cicely added pensively:

"When hounds run across Wilverley I look before I leap."

"Ah! Then you do see the difference between Wilverley and Upworthy?"

Reluctantly, feeling rather disloyal, Cicely had to confess that the difference did obtrude itself. Since Arthur's return, she had ridden out with him about once a week. A groom accompanied them. Arthur would dismount and take Cicely into his cottages, asking many questions, insisting upon truthful answers, checking, so to speak, the reports, written and spoken, of his agent, leaving nothing to chance or mischance. His actions as a landlord revealed him far more clearly to Cicely than the halting words with which at first he had tried to capture her affections. She began to wonder what Upworthy would look like under Wilverley management. If she married this good, capable fellow, would he put his stout shoulder to the wheel of a mother-in-law? Tentatively, with a faint flush upon her cheeks, she said to him:

"I wish, Arthur, that you could persuade Mother to make a few improvements at Upworthy."

He replied, with a touch of irritation:

"Good heavens! As it is, I can't find time to mind my own business. Lady Selina would resent any interference. I thought that Grimshaw——"

He broke off abruptly, realising that an indictment of Chandos methods had almost escaped him.

"Please go on. What did you expect from Mr. Grimshaw?"

Evading the direct question, she pressed him vehemently:

Digitized by Google

"I do so want to know what might be done. If it isn't your business, it might be mine, mightn't it?"

He eyed her keenly. Was she thinking of a dire possibility, the death of her brother? Her next words reassured him.

"You see, Arthur, Brian knows nothing about estate management. He's a soldier, and I'm glad he is."

"Perhaps you are sorry that I am not?"

She replied gracefully:

"But you are. You are fighting as hard as any man I know."

"Thanks." His voice softened. "What do you want to know?"

She picked her phrases carefully, and they had been prepared, pat to just such an opportunity.

"I want to know why things have drifted into the present pass. I want to know who is really responsible? And most of all I want to know if anything can be done."

The sincerity in her voice, the trouble in her eyes, moved him poignantly. And this was the first appeal of weakness to strength always so irresistible and captivating. He answered her as sincerely, plunging headlong into the subject, speaking, however, with that tincture of exasperation which marred somewhat his efforts on public platforms. Knowledge is at heart intolerant of ignorance, but your silver-tongued orator would lose half his power if he betrayed this.

"I'll do my best, Cicely. But I propose to leave your mother out of it. I can't criticise her to you. And really she is the victim of circumstances almost beyond her control."

"Almost?"

"I said almost. Something utterly unforeseen might change her point of view. She believes firmly that she is

Digitized by Google

acting for the best. For the moment let us leave it at that. Unhappily, she has a bad bailiff. And your Inspector of Nuisances is in the hands of your Board of Guardians, small farmers who are terrified of improvements because it would mean a rise in rates. And then there's Snitterfield——!"

"Dr. Snitterfield?"

"Your Health Officer, also in the hands of your Guardians, and elected by them. Snitterfield, the Inspector, and Gridley pursue a policy of masterly inactivity. Grimshaw found himself up against those three, up against vested interests, up against absurd medical etiquette. I rather hoped that he would call upon the Chief Medical Officer of the County, a good man, but that would have meant an appalling rumpus. Grimshaw would have had to prove his case up to the hilt; no easy matter. Probably he would have hostilised your mother. Old Pawley, perhaps, restrained him. I don't know. I'm not surprised that Grimshaw bolted."

"He didn't."

"I felt at the time that I should have bolted. Grimshaw told me that just such intolerable conditions drove him out of Essex and Poplar."

"Mr. Grimshaw went to France because he was needed there. I am sure of that."

"I daresay. Anyway, he left Upworthy. Where was I? Oh, yes. I can't tell you where responsibility begins or ends. Our land system howls to heaven for reform. And I can't tell you what ought to be done at Upworthy. Tinkering with improvements is bad business. For the present, at any rate, until this accursed war ends, Lady Selina must be left alone. I—I'm sorry I spoke with such heat."

"I am much obliged to you," said Cicely.

Digitized by Google

V

This confidential talk produced one unexpected effect. Cicely's plastic mind, plastic under any dominating hand, began to envisage Grimshaw as driven out of Upworthy by circumstance. Instinct had told her that Wilverley's conjecture was wrong, and instinct happened to be right. But her intelligence, much sharpened by Tiddy, reversed the first judgment. She beheld Grimshaw turning his back upon a hopeless fight, as admittedly he had done before. And if this were true, he would not come back.

He had not written to her.

Not even to Tiddy would she admit that she had hoped for a letter. If he cared, he would surely write. He might write, if he didn't care. And he had written to Mrs. Rockram, an epistle read aloud to Cicely and then put away as a cherished souvenir of a perfect gentleman. Grimshaw had written also more than once to Dr. Pawley, but Cicely had not read these letters. She gathered from an old friend that Grimshaw was doing first-class work, likely to be recognised, if not rewarded, at Headquarters. Pawley said to her regretfully:

"This parish is too small for him."

And at the time, Hope had whispered the flattering tale: "Yes, it is; but I'm in it, and he'll come back on my account."

Now Hope faded out of sight.

Of course the sharp-eyed Tiddy perceived that her friend was passing through a bad time. The flame of patriotism burned less brightly; the daily drudgery went on imposing fresh exacerbations. Tiddy felt very sorry, but she reflected, not without an inward smile, that Cicely would profit by these bludgeonings. She would learn what Sir Nathaniel called—values. Meanwhile, an unhappy young

Digitized by Google

gentlewoman might mar her own life, and that of another, by marrying the wrong man. Tiddy decided that Arthur Wilverley was a good fellow. But he would take Cicely into his ample maw and absorb her. She would become Lord Wilverley's wife, an amiable nonenity. She decided, also, with equal cocksureness, that such a match would prove disastrous to the husband. Wilverley worked in a circle likely to grow smaller if he were left alone with his potentialities. His energies would centre upon himself and his possessions. In this regard the author of Miss Tiddle's being furnished an object-lesson. He reigned supreme in the pill factories and on occasion assumed the god, thereby shaking not the spheres but the sides of those who beheld him.

Eventually Tiddy came to the conclusion that Cicely and Wilverley were drifting, like leaves upon a stream, into marriage.

"I must take a hand in this game," thought Miss Tiddle.

The necessity of doing "something" became even more imperative when she marshalled the forces arrayed against her. Lady Selina, she decided, was exercising, perhaps unconsciously, continual pressure. Mrs. Roden was plainly bent upon lending Providence a helping finger. She said majestically to Tiddy:

"You are a very sharp young lady."

"Thank you, Mrs. Roden," Tiddy demurely replied.

"Between ourselves, my dear"—Tiddy smiled—"I can assure you that the happiness of others concerns me more, much more, than my own."

This was quite untrue, and Tiddy knew it. Mrs. Roden continued:

"You must have noticed what is going on under our noses?"

Digitized by Google

Tiddy intimated, abstaining from slang, that her eyes were not altogether ornamental.

Mrs. Roden, warming to altruistic work, pursued the even tenor of her way.

"In my opinion, these two dear people want pushing."

"Sometimes I could shake Cis," said Tiddy.

"Yes, yes. Now, once more strictly between ourselves——"

"That is understood."

"I have decided that you, my dear, should—a—give the little push."

"Really?"

"I am sure of it."

"I don't think, Mrs. Roden, that I could push Lord Wilverley."

"Certainly not. Being the man he is, of a somewhat nervous stolidity, irritably energetic, if I may say so, he might resent pushing from you. I propose to push him. I want you to push Cicely. Together we shall achieve our purpose."

"I see."

"I can't conceive of a happier, more suitable match. It would be, I venture to affirm, abundantly blessed. Whenever I look at them, I think of—a——"

"The multiplication table?"

"How quick you are! Yes, yes—the patter of little feet appeals to me tremendously. I am glad to think that such a vital subject can be frankly discussed between a matron and a maid. The maids will make beter matrons when absurd reserves become obsolete. All that is needed in this case is adjustment, the little touch that turns the balance. It is a great privilege to give such touches. I need say no more."

Digitized by Google

"I understand," said Tiddy. "I shall push for all I'm worth."

VI

"In the other direction," she added mentally.

That same night, during the rite of hair-brushing, Tiddy said abruptly, well aware, of course, that a push, to be effective, should be administered without warning:

"Are you playing the game with Lord Wilverley?"

"I beg your pardon, Tiddy?"

"Never do that. It's a device to gain time. You heard me. Are you playing the game? If not—as Mrs. Roden would say—why not?"

"I don't know what to say."

"Then I'll say it for you. I advised you before I came here to flirt with this nice big man. I was thinking for you, doing what I should do myself. I hold that a sensible girl must get really intimate with a man whom she may eventually marry. Under our stupid shibboleths and conventions that is called 'flirting.' There's no harm in it, up to a point. In my opinion you have passed that point."

"Have I?" Cicely considered this pensively.

"Yes; he has behaved with astounding patience and consideration. He is crystal-clear. He wants you. If you don't want him, say so, and have done with it. I think I can read you as easily as you read him. You would like to please your mother, who, for the first time in her amazing life, is feeling, as you told me, forlorn; you are getting fed up with war work and bottle-washing, and you hanker for a change, *any change;* also, you have a vague and quite excellent notion that Lord Wilverley, as a son-in-law, might persuade your mother to let him take Upworthy in hand. Probably he would, with little coaxing from you. In your less robust moments you rather gloat over this opportunity

Digitized by Google

of self-sacrifice. On the other hand, it's obvious that you don't really love this good, honest fellow; you are piqued because Romeo did the vanishing stunt. You might have come to some sort of an understanding, but silly pride prevented that. Agatha captured her John right enough."

"Because she knew that he loved her."

"In your funny little heart you believe that Romeo loves you. Pride upset his apple-cart. Now—what are you going to do?"

Cicely, to Miss Tiddle's rage and disgust, answered the question by melting into tears. Tiddy, without a word, rose from her chair, opened an umbrella, and sat down under it with a derisive smile upon her lips.

"When the shower is over," she remarked tartly, "I'll put down my umbrella."

Cicely, feeling ridiculous, gulped down her sobs.

"I wish I had your brains."

"Tosh! Your brains are O. K. You're too indolent to use them. Marry the wrong man, and your brains will become a negligible quantity. What beats me is that Lord Wilverley should talk to you at all when he might talk to me."

At this Cicely "sat up," literally and metaphorically. Tiddy closed her umbrella, but held it ready for use. She added calmly:

"I could make him talk to me, if I tried."

"Take him from me, you mean?"

"Quite easily."

Cicely's eyes began to sparkle.

"He ought to marry a woman with some snap and ginger. I could egg him on to great things."

Cicely made an incredulous gesture. Then she said acrimoniously:

Digitized by Google

"I suppose you don't believe in friendship between a man and a girl?"

"I don't."

"Well, I do. Friendship between girls is rather difficult."

"Friendship between any two persons is very difficult. Most women are too exacting in their friendships. For instance, you expect a lot of sloppy sentiment from me. You won't get it. My object is to save you from yourself. You are drifting. If you really want to drift, say so, and I'll shut up. But I warn you, within a day or two you'll have to say 'yes' or 'no' to Arthur Wilverley. If you temporise, he'll think you a rotter."

"If Arthur bustles me, I shall say 'no.'"

"I knew it!" exclaimed Miss Tiddle, triumphantly. "You don't love him."

"I—I might."

Tiddy wisely said no more.

Next day, Destiny interfered. At a moment when Lady Selina had good reason to think that her son would be spared, because our cavalry were well out of the danger zone, Brian Chandos was offered and accepted a staff appointment.

Three days afterwards he was shot through the head, when carrying despatches, and died instantly.

Cicely was summoned home. Lady Selina met her upon the threshold of the great hall. Stimson hurried away, leaving mother and daughter alone. Outwardly, Lady Selina remained calm. To Cicely she seemed to have become suddenly an old woman. Her face was white and lined, but she held her head erect. Her voice never faltered. When Cicely gripped her convulsively, she took the girl's face between her hands and gazed at it mournfully.

"I want you, child; I want you—desperately."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VI

GRIMSHAW RETURNS

I

GREAT events took place during this summer of 1915. Italy joined the Allies; and the Hun advance was stopped. Once again wise men said that the war was coming to an end; and wiser than they contended stubbornly that it wasn't. Cicely remained at the Manor with Lady Selina. After the first fortnight, they went for a month to Danecourt Abbey, where they listened, not without impatience on Cicely's part, to long jeremiads from Lord Saltaire, who predicted the end of the world, and quoted the Book of Revelation to prove that the All-Highest was the Beast. Expenses at the Abbey had indeed been reduced to the minimum. The family butler, accustomed to three tall footmen, whose places were filled by one boy, gave notice. He had been with Lord Saltaire for many years.

"Why are you leaving me?" asked his master, fretfully.

"Because, my lord, if you will be good enough to pardon the expression, I can't stick it any longer."

Lord Saltaire, as he confessed afterwards, was stupefied into silence. The butler departed.

Cicely told herself that she, too, couldn't stay on beyond the appointed month. She beheld her uncle's domains with uneasy eyes, sharpened to critical detachment after six months at Wilverley. The same obsolete system of

Digitized by Google

estate management that howled for reform at Upworthy was even more vocal at Danecourt. But Lady Selina, like her brother, remained blind and deaf to signs and sounds that ate ravagingly into Cicely's sensibilities. Wages all over the vast property remained low, although prices had risen. Old men in the gardens and stables followed the butler into a more generous world, because they were unable to "stick it." Farmers were waxing fat and prosperous, whilst their labourers were sweated. Spurred to speech, Cicely said one day to her mother:

"Things are going to pieces here, Mother."

Lady Selina replied solemnly, with mournful resignation: "Our class is hit harder than any other."

"But Uncle could sell some of his land."

"Sell his land? What are you talking about? Sell the land that has been in our possession four hundred years——!"

Cicely murmured almost inaudibly:

"I think land poverty is awful."

"We are all of the same mind about that, child."

They duly returned to the Manor, where a pathetic surprise brought tears to Cicely's eyes. Hitherto she had occupied a small bedroom, a virginal bower of blue-and-white. Across the corridor were Brian's rooms, a bedroom and a sitting-room. During their absence Lady Selina had re-papered and re-decorated these two rooms charmingly:

"They are yours, my dear," she said quietly.

It happened to be the first indication of the tremendous change in Cicely's prospects. Till now not a word had been said by Lady Selina in remotest allusion to that change. But, at times, the girl had been conscious of intent eyes gazing interrogatively into hers, as if to say: "What will she do with it?" And, very rarely, when the pair were sitting together, Lady Selina would take Cicely's hand, and

Digitized by Google

hold it tenderly and yet tenaciously, as if it were a precious possession, more—an instrument to be used for a definite purpose.

Lady Selina sat down. With an authoritative gesture she invited Cicely to occupy Brian's chair, now freshly covered with chintz. Cicely felt curiously awed.

"One day," said Lady Selina, "Upworthy will be yours."

A vast burden seemed to the girl to be descending upon her. She looked at Lady Selina with such an expression as might be glimpsed in the eyes of an intelligent young horse about to be harnessed to a cart loaded high with mother-earth. Tons of Upworthy clay!

"Property, my dear, is a very sacred trust."

Suddenly, she frowned, for she remembered John Exton's words. The abominable scene reproduced itself vividly. She could see John's eager, resentful face and hear his provocative words. As instantly she beheld the debonair Brian derisively amused by the Anarchist. Her voice was less soft as she added:

"Opinions, of course, may vary in regard to the administration of a trust."

"Yes."

Lady Selina continued more easily, as the vision of John Exton faded out of her mind:

"With abundant private means, with such an income as dear Arthur enjoys, for instance, an income happily independent of land, estate management becomes easy—easy."

Cicely was constrained to dispute this.

"I don't think, Mother, that Arthur finds it so."

"Well, well, you may know more about that than I do. Here, at any rate, ways have to be adjusted to means. And the ways seem to increase as the means diminish."

She ended with a sigh. Cicely, sensible that her mother was expecting from her some sort of positive declaration, sen-

Digitized by Google

sible also that if she spoke her mind freely she would wound and amaze a devoted mother, hesitated. Had her mother purposely used Arthur's name? Did she contemplate estate management made easy by a rich son-in-law? She was well aware that Tiddy had predicted aright. Brian's death had cut short a second proposal. Absence, she felt assured, had not cooled Arthur's feelings for her. Twice he had written. And every sentence in his letters seemed to end with a note of interrogation: "Will you?" When they met, in a day or two, he would exact the answer categorical. Did a fond mother take for granted what that answer would be?

"You love the old ways, Mother?"

"Of course I do. Don't you?"

Cicely felt herself sinking into Upworthy clay, deeper and deeper.

"Can we go on walking in them?"

"I shall walk in them to the end."

The finality of her tone petrified Cicely into silence. All power of resistance seemed to ooze from her, leaving her invertebrate. The tentacles of tradition and heredity enwrapped her. What was the use of struggling? She stole a glance at her mother's face, now an impenetrable mask. Obviously, the mere suggestion that the old ways were overgrown by the new vegetation and becoming impassable had irritated Lord Saltaire's sister. It had never occurred to Cicely before that her mother was not a Chandos. Now, furtively examining Lady Selina's features, the likeness to Lord Saltaire came out strikingly. Before the war her uncle had presented the same gracious personality to a world that acclaimed him as a distinguished ornament. To-day—and even Lord Saltaire recognised this—manners were at a discount. Tiddy had said pertly: "Lords have slumped." More, Cicely had to confess to herself that her mother and

Digitized by Google

uncle seemed to have lost something almost indefinable, that assured sense of position and rank. Out of heads still held high smouldered anxious eyes, mutely asking questions which the owners of the eyes refused to answer for themselves. Lord Saltaire no longer moved as Agamemnon amongst his people. . . . And "pinching" had pinched him, making him petulant, fractious, and "gey hard to live wi'." With dismay Cicely confronted the fact that she was half Chandos and half Danecourt. Incredible that such high breeding might be reckoned a disability——"

Her trembling lips refused their office. And the words that fluttered into her perplexed mind seemed wholly inadequate. Being half Chandos, she held her tongue, wondering miserably what Tiddy would have said. She had wit enough to realise that protest would be futile. If she allowed her mother one penetrating glance into her heart, civil war must be declared between them. And her mother would suffer more than herself. Swiftly she came to the conclusion that mother must be "spared." She decided that she would consult her old friend, Dr. Pawley. He, of course, had held his tongue; so had Goodrich. And if of late she had begun to wonder at and condemn their policy of *laissez faire,* now—in one illuminating moment—she understood and condoned fully their seeming moral cowardice.

She heard her mother's voice again, soft and sweet.

"You are my own darling little girl, all I have. With God's help and blessing we will walk together and work together. I—I——" Her voice faltered, and then became steady. "I am not selfish enough to wish to keep you to myself. I know, none better, that you need a strong man's guidance and protection. I know, too, that you will choose your mate wisely, with an intelligent sense of all, *all,* I repeat, that marriage includes. Passion is an ephemeral emotion which gentlewomen distrust instinctively. At the

Digitized by Google

best it must die down with the years. I was very happy in my marriage, because I found in your dear father the qualities that endure—fidelity, high honour, stainless integrity, and an unswerving purpose in the conduct of life. He did his duty. I was fortunate, also, in finding a man older and wiser than myself, in whose strength I could trust."

She rose to her feet, standing very erect, an imposing figure in her black draperies. She might have stood thus in a Greek tragedy, impersonating one of the Parcæ. Cicely was immensely impressed. She rose also. Her mother kissed her.

"These rooms," she murmured, "are rather overpowering. I will go to my own and be quiet for a little. But you—you are glad to be here, aren't you? Your memories of our dearest boy are all fragrant and happy. Perhaps I allowed my ambitions for him too great an ascendancy in my heart——"

She paused. Cicely divined that her mother's careful choice of words indicated previous thought, self-analysis. Yes; bitter disappointment underlay her tranquil phrases. These rooms held the emptiness of an ancient house. She understood why her mother had changed them almost out of recognition.

"I am glad to be here," she answered, in a strangled voice. "I—I hope, Mother, that I—I—I——"

She couldn't finish the sentence. Lady Selina kissed her again.

"You will take his place," she whispered. "That is the one consolation of my life."

Cicelv was left alone with her disquieting reflections.

II

Next day, Arthur Wilverley rode over to the Manor. As he rode he gave a loose rein to introspection, to which

Digitized by Google

the easy canter of a good hack lends itself. Strenuously as he would have denied it, this honest fellow had hitherto cantered as easily through life, taking all fences in his stride. And they had been small fences. He was now approaching what he deemed to be the biggest fence which as yet he had tried to negotiate—marriage. It annoyed him a little that he was not more excited. A nodding acquaintance with the best fiction had encouraged him to expect as a lover thrills and ardours which unaccountably had not been experienced. Why? Was he different from other men? Had he strolled into this attachment at an age when common sense overruled sentiment? Had he atrophied, by disuse, certain nerve-centres quite wrongly supposed by novelists to be cardiac? He had never, for example, even in his salad days, contemplated the possibility of a world well lost for love. But he had known men, lots of them, who had "chucked" everything—position, honour, self-respect—to gratify one colossal overwhelming desire. Amazing. . . .!

Too honest to befool himself or anybody else, he was well aware that if he "took a toss" over this next fence he would pick himself up, mount his horse, and canter on as before. He might feel stiff and sore—doubtless he would; he might funk that particular fence ever after, but his well-ordered world would not fall into chaos.

This conviction, however, underlay another. Confidence in his horsemanship sustained our cavalier. He did not anticipate a toss. Cicely—bless her!—had been rushed the first time—his fault. It rather pleased him to think that she, like himself, could exhibit restraint and common sense. Once, some five years before, he had officiated as best man to a friend younger than himself, a bit of a thruster. The thruster, over a glass of champagne, had waxed confidential, describing a tempestuous wooing and an unconditional surrender. Wilverley could recall his friend's exact words:

Digitized by Google

"When I popped, she gave a sort of yelp and rushed at me."

At the time Wilverley had laughed, but later the lady in question had yelped and rushed at another fellow. She was built that way. Cicely would not yelp or rush. He pictured her yielding with virginal modesty to the restrained advances of her lover, blushing adorably. Wilverley had rehearsed the scene. He beheld himself and Cicely on a bench in the more secluded part of the topiary garden, screened by yew hedges from inquisitive eyes of gardeners. Then he would tell his tale. She would listen demurely, with downcast eyes. The amorini in the garden would approve this gentle wooing. Presently he would take her little hand in his. When he ventured to kiss her cheek, she might turn her lips from him. Yes; being a Chandos, she would. In his pocket, in tissue paper, lay the filmy hanky. At the right moment he would show it to her. There would be pleasant talk about the choice of an engagement ring. Later they would seek together Lady Selina, and receive the maternal sanction and benediction. . . .

Mrs. Roden had given her push the day before. Six weeks had elapsed since Brian's death. She had considered the propriety of urging her brother to propose again by letter, rejecting such consideration after matured thought. Personality counted enormously in these affairs. Arthur had a "way" with him. He "loomed up." Young girls of the twentieth century had just begun to enjoy the privileges of independent thought and action. Mrs. Roden rejoiced that it was so. Still——! At this point the adjuster paused to reflect upon the immense change in Cicely's fortunes. Alone in her room at Danecourt, turning from a mournful present to a more alluring future, Cicely might well hesitate before she imperilled her freedom. Alone with Wilver-

Digitized by Google

ley, dominated by him, conscious that she had encouraged him, the right answer must be forthcoming.

Accordingly, Mrs. Roden had said at luncheon:

"Lady Selina returns to Upworthy to-morrow."

"So Cicely told me."

"Ah! She has written to you?"

"Yes."

"Of course you will go over and pay your respects at once."

"If I can spare the time——"

"My dear Arthur, try to rise to your full stature."

Wilverley replied briskly:

"Now, Mary, out with it. What's in your busy mind?"

"Concern for others. Concern for you. There are moments, Arthur, when you impress me as being a big boy. At such moments I feel maternal."

"Forrard! Forrard!"

"I told you some months ago to—to—let me see, what did I say?"

"You told me to 'go' for Cicely—and I did. She turned me down. No complaints! I acted prematurely."

"From what you told me she encouraged you to try again."

"And I shall."

"Quite. The right moment has come. Cicely must have recovered from her bereavement. If I know anything of my sex"—her tone justified the assumption that what Mrs. Roden did not know upon that fascinating subject was negligible—"Cicely is ripe for the plucking."

"You talk of her as if she were a goose," he said.

"Pray don't interrupt me! Cicely is a sensible girl, thank God! She is also a good girl, fully alive to the responsibilities of marriage. As a potential mother——"

Wilverley held up a hand.

Digitized by Google

"Don't be obstetric, Mary, please."

"What a word——! I am never *that*. However——! How you heckle my thoughts! I repeat, Cicely is ripe for the plucking. You have only to stretch forth your hand. Lady Selina will be much gratified if you call at once. I refrain from accompanying you for obvious reasons. The weather is settled. I regard that as a sign. I am quite sure that Cicely has been dull and depressed at Danecourt Castle."

"Abbey."

"I call it a feudal stronghold. Probably she was bored to tears. She comes home hankering for a change—any change. You appear—not wearing that tie——"

"You shall select my tie."

"Thank you, Arthur. You appear—the perfect knight——"

"Help!"

"You offer all, all that such a girl wants. *Voilà!*"

"There is something in what you say, Mary. Yes, you are right. I'll take the road to-morrow. I may not succeed in getting Cicely alone."

"Then you are not the man I take you to be."

Mrs. Roden left the dining-room. Wilverley finished a good cigar, quite unconscious of having been "pushed."

III

Stimson ushered him into the big drawing-room. Left alone for a minute, he stared, as Grimshaw had done, at the full-length portraits on the walls. The ladies smiled down on him. Sir Marmaduke Chandos, the Cavalier, curled a derisive lip, not offensively. He seemed to be saying: "S'death! we need a tincture of blood less blue. Take the wench, and a benison on ye both."

Digitized by Google

Lady Selina sailed in, followed by Cicely.

Immediately the man perceived a change in the maid. She appeared to him older. And something had vanished from her face. What was it? Youthful radiancy—vitality——? He couldn't find the word he wanted. She greeted him with perfect ease of manner. But her hand rested supinely warm in his, and he thought: "How soft her bones are." Possibly she was tired; and this home-coming must have been a bitter-sweet experience. Beneath her eyes lay shadows, delicately tinted with lavender. All trace of the V.A.D. had disappeared. Her mourning, so he decided, became her. In it she looked distinguished. At any rate, she appealed to him more irresistibly than ever, altogether feminine, a dear woman certain to develop into a noble and gracious personality.

He drank a cup of tea, and listened to Lady Selina, who talked in the grand manner, investing even weather conditions with a sort of aristocratic gloss. All the Danecourts talked like this when they wished to suppress feeling and emotion. Without a taint of affectation, Lady Selina conveyed the impression that she towered above a crumbling world. Marie Antoinette must have raised to heaven just such a dignified head when she rode on a tumbril through the streets of Paris to the place of execution. Lady Selina quoted her brother:

"Our order is doomed. Win or lose, this dreadful war means a débâcle for us."

Wilverley assured her that he took a less gloomy view. Lady Selina smiled frostily.

"Saltaire has lost his butler, who has been with him five-and-twenty years. Two parlourmaids have taken his place. One wears a bow upon her tousled head; she refuses to wear a proper cap. My poor brother said to me: 'Selina, this is the beginning of the end.' I agreed with him."

Digitized by Google

After tea, when Wilverley was wondering how he could discreetly justify Mrs. Roden's faith in him as a man, Lady Selina said suavely:

"I daresay you will like to smoke your cigarette in the garden. A year ago it was in full beauty. To-day——! Well—a wilderness. I can't bear to walk in it. Cicely will show you the roses. I must attack my neglected correspondence."

"I should like to see the roses," said Wilverley.

Cicely and he wandered into the garden, which looked, so Wilverley thought, very much as usual. At the Court he had discovered, not without amusement, that a sadly diminished staff, if put to it, can achieve remarkable results. Gazing about him, he said genially:

"Your mother exaggerates a little. I see no signs of a wilderness."

Cicely replied quickly:

"Really, we are muddling along nicely. Mother will be all right in a day or two. Danecourt was horribly depressing. And Brian——"

"Tell me," he whispered. "I offered no wretched condolences. What can be said?"

"Nothing. Even I—I can only guess how she feels. She adored Brian, although she never showed it. I am so sorry for her that I could cry my eyes out here and now. Because she bottles things up, it makes it just twice as hard for me."

"I understand," he said. "I understand exactly how you feel."

She looked sweetly at him, faintly blushing.

"Do you, Arthur?"

They found the bench; Wilverley lighted a cigarette. The sunk rose-garden faced them, surrounded by the yew hedges. In the centre the amorini guarded the fountain, which didn't

Digitized by Google

play in war-time. This spot was the sanctuary, known as Mon Plaisir. Upon the white stone bench had sat the lovely lady for whom the pleasuance was planted, and in which, according to tradition, she had passed so many hours kept a prisoner by a jealous husband. Cicely told the story to Wilverley. A more experienced lover would have used this romantic legend as a peg upon which to hang his own love-tale. Wilverley, however, was not apt at transpositions. He listened attentively, charmed by Cicely's voice, but determined, as soon as she had finished, to plead his suit in words, as has been said, already rehearsed.

Cicely voice died away.

Wilverley said incisively:

"Poor little dear! Beastly for her, wasn't it? No man could coop up a wife that way in our times."

"I don't know, Arthur. In another sense, women coop themselves up. Some of us are driven—driven into coops."

He was astonished that she spoke so sadly, but, knowing little of women and their tendency to make all argument personal, he never supposed that what she said applied to herself. In a different tone he continued briskly:

"My wife would have a free hand, Cicely. By the way, I have been talking a lot with Tiddy whilst you were at Danecourt."

"With Tiddy? Do you call her Tiddy?"

He laughed.

"Of course I do; everybody does. A jolly clever girl, sharp as a needle—a rattling good sort. She will bike over here next Sunday."

"Oh! Does Tiddy know that you are here to-day?"

"No."

Chandos silence spread its impenetrable veil over Cicely. What was Tiddy up to? Had she carried out her preposterous threat? Was she really trying to capture Arthur?

Digitized by Google

An uncomfortable, disconcerting emotion, which Cicely would have repudiated vehemently if anybody had dared to call it jealousy, quickened within. Wilverley, happily unconscious of virginal alarums and excursions, went on cantering at his big fence.

"I have something to show you, dear."

"Have you?"

He produced triumphantly the tiny handkerchief embroidered with a double "C" intertwined and encircled with a wreath. Lady Selina had presented a dainty dozen of these to Cicely on her seventeenth birthday, a *præmium diligentiæ*.

Cicely, faintly smiling, gazed at the small square of cambric, and then at Wilverley's flushed, eager face. And at the moment, incredible as it may seem to men, she felt, like Mrs. Roden, maternal. The prosperous magnate of nearly forty became a jolly boy. Somehow she guessed that in many things he would remain simple and boyish. He seemed to be enjoying himself immensely. He reminded her of Brian going in to bat on the village green, and quite sure that he was going to knock the bowling about.

He whispered:

"I've heartened myself up with a squint at this, many and many a time."

As he spoke, he put it reverently to his lips and kissed it. Cicely was amazed. She had always imagined Wilverley, engrossed with his never-ending activities, reading dry treatises upon agriculture, poring over the blue tracings of plans, prodding fat bullocks, and so forth——

Two dimples appeared in her cheeks.

"How absurd you are!"

"Are you angry because I am absurd about you?"

He folded the hanky carefully and replaced it in his breast-pocket. Then he valiantly captured her hand, a

Digitized by Google

notable effort for him. Cicely made no protest. An agreeable languor stole upon her. Somehow Wilverley's firm clasp warmed her chilled sensibilities. She sighed. A midsummer's sun, still high in the heavens, poured down his beams upon the rose-garden. Out of the more old-fashioned roses came a sweet, pervasive fragrance. From the shrubs and trees beyond Mon Plaisir floated the flutings of the warblers. Cicely was learned enough in Arcadian lore to distinguish their particular notes.

"I want you," he whispered.

Her tissues seemed to relax, as she recalled these very words on the lips of her mother, when they met in the big hall after news of Brian's death. It was much to be wanted; more than she had reckoned it to be. To give, to go on giving, generously and selflessly, might be her true mission in life. Parsons preached that gospel from the pulpit, but till now she had never apprehended its significance and force. Yes—*force*. Was there, indeed, a driving power greater, immeasurably greater, than the human will, which informed all human action? Was marriage with Wilverley the appointed way out of her worries and perplexities? His strong arm stole round her waist; he pressed her to him. She recognised and admired his self-restraint. And something told her that he was really strong, able to bear her burdens whatever they might be. But—a cold douche of honesty made her shiver—she didn't love him as surely he deserved to be loved. What had passed through his mind as he rode to this artless wooing invaded hers. She ought to be thrilling and yearning; she ought to be feeling that this was the greatest moment of her life. And it wasn't. Bravely she confronted a fundamental fact.

"Arthur——"

"Yes, you sweet little woman?"

"You say you want me. How much?"

Digitized by Google

It is not easy for a man to be absolutely honest with a maid when his arm is round her waist, and he feels her yielding to his importunity.

"Tremendously," he answered.

She remained silent. Encouraged by this, Wilverley pleaded his suit. He had always wanted her. She was exactly right. With happy inspiration he painted in vivid colours their future together. She could help him in his work; he could help her. They both loved the country. They would work and play together, a charming partnership. When he finished, she said nervously:

"Suppose—suppose that I didn't quite care for you as you seem to care for me?"

"What do you mean, my dearest?"

"It's so hard to put it into words. I am ever so fond of you, Arthur. And I do want to be loved. You—you have drawn a picture which moves me more than I can say. But somehow you haven't swept me bang off my feet. And that is my fault, not yours. Perhaps—I don't know—I am simply incapable of—of letting myself go. And when I look at mother and other women of my family, I wonder if they are all like that. I wonder if—if it is part of the curse——"

"The curse? Bless my soul!"

"I mean the curse of belonging to families that think it right and wise to suppress feeling. I am half Chandos and half Danecourt. Mother and Uncle have never let themselves go. They couldn't. It is part of their nature to wear a mask. They wear it night and day. Till it becomes a sort of hard crust. I—I wish I could talk as Tiddy does."

"I understand, Cicely. I think you put it most awfully well. But this feeling will come. I should hate to have you——" he paused, and ended with the words which had made such an impression on him: "Yelp and rush at me."

Digitized by Google

"Do you mean that you want me as I am, that you will trust to chance about my caring properly later?"

"Trust to chance? No, no. I have never trusted to chance. I am confident, dear, that I shall make you care if you give yourself to me. The feelings you speak of are dormant. It will be my great privilege to awaken them."

He kissed the cheek slightly turned from him.

The fence had been leaped.

And afterwards, just what he had envisaged came to pass easily and naturally. The selection of a right engagement ring was discussed, a visit to London, all the pleasant little plans so dear to people about to marry. Before they sought Lady Selina, Cicely asked a direct question:

"You will help to make things better in Upworthy?"

"Um! Do you mean now?"

"Oh, the sooner the better."

"If your mother asks for my advice—— I can speak to you quite candidly, darling. To put things right at Upworthy means, in one word—money."

"Mother knows that, and she says that her means are diminishing."

"Heavy taxation—likely to be heavier. It would be quite impracticable to put things right out of income."

"Oh, dear!"

"Don't look so miserable! Improvements are investments. I borrow money for my improvements—everybody does; and your mother must do the same."

"She won't."

"Why not?"

"Because she is terrified of debt; because, I believe, she promised my father not to encumber the property."

Wilverley nodded his head. Then, hastily, he changed the subject.

Digitized by Google

IV

A memorable evening followed. When Lady Selina learnt what had passed in the rose-garden, years seemed to drop from her tired face. The change was almost uncanny. Colour flowed again into her cheeks; her eyes sparkled with animation. Dear Arthur must stay to dinner; they would dine on the lawn under the big walnut-tree; he could ride home by moonlight. As she talked, her mind flew into the future. Before she drank to the health of the lovers, she had definitely decided that the second son of this perfect marriage would take the name of Chandos and inherit Upworthy. He would be, of course, another Brian. The eldest son would go to Eton; Brian II. must be entered at Winchester. It was a mistake to send brothers to the same school.

Throughout dinner she achieved the remarkable feat of being in two places at the same time, like Sir Boyle Roche's bird.

When Wilverley had mounted his hack, mother and daughter sat together, nearer and dearer to each other than they had ever been before. But it was Lady Selina who revealed her inmost feelings. Apparently, she took for granted that Cicely was head over ears in love. The girl dared not undeceive her. And Lady Selina, with her really transcendent gift of ignoring what lay beneath the surface, dwelt persistently upon the phylacteries of life. All energy seemed to have passed from Cicely to her. Obviously Cicely was ten years older and Lady Selina ten years younger. They drifted closer together in their quest of what was appropriate and conventional. Lady Selina had no patience with long engagements. The wedding ought to take place in the early autumn, so that the honeymoon could be spent in sunshine. She quoted:

Digitized by Google

"God knows how I love the sweet fall of the year."

Cicely realised that her engagement had made the fall of her mother's year sweet and comforting.

During this long talk, Lady Selina happened to mention that, since Brian's death, she had pigeon-holed village affairs. But she had heard from Stimson that Dr. Pawley was ill. Not, she trusted, seriously—a passing indisposition. Upon the morrow Cicely might pop down in person and get more details. She herself would be busy with Gridley. At the mention of the bailiff's name, Cicely, girding up her loins for an encounter, said hurriedly:

"Is John Gridley all he ought to be?"

Lady Selina replied trenchantly:

"My dear child—what a question! Gridley is—Gridley. Are any of us what we ought to be? I am well aware of Gridley's disabilities. I pay him little more than a labourer's wages. I regard him as a spade."

"Yes; I have thought sometimes that Gridley is too rough with our people. He—he bullies them."

"Possibly. Their ways are not our ways. Being of the people, he knows how to deal with them. He is an honest, faithful servant, quite impossible to replace in these troublous times. Also, as you know, I am the last person in the world to 'scrap,' as your friend Tiddy would put it, old retainers."

"Do you feel that way about Dr. Snitterfield?"

"Dr. Snitterfield! What on earth have I to do with him?"

"He is the local Health Officer. Arthur thinks that he is —a—ignorant and irresponsible."

"Does he? I didn't appoint Dr. Snitterfield. He happens to be the chosen representative of our district. I hardly know the man. Personally, of course, I regard him as

Digitized by Google

impossible. Long ago, I asked him to luncheon. He was attending one of our maids. She, not I, insisted upon seeing him. At luncheon the stopper of one of the decanters stuck. Dr. Snitterfield got it out, licked it—*licked* it, my dear!—and calmly assured me that he did that to his stoppers! After that Stimson kept him at a discreet distance."

Cicely abandoned both Gridley and Snitterfield. Could she spoil a wonderful evening by insisting upon the disqualifications of bailiff and Health Officer? When she remained silent, Lady Selina said decidedly:

"After I am gone, Arthur and you will cope with my difficulties. Arthur's agent will take Upworthy in hand; Arthur's money will do the needful."

"If—if, Mother, Arthur wanted to help in your lifetime?"

"I could not accept thousands of pounds from Arthur. Now, my darling, please don't worry about me and my responsibilities. This is your hour. Make the most of it. Your happiness makes me happy. I can think of nothing else."

V

Upon the following morning, Cicely, in a white frock with black ribands, walked from the Manor to Dr. Pawley's house. At Lady Selina's request she was wearing the white frock. The weather happened to be very hot; a heat-wave had spread itself over the south of England. This alone justified thin and light garments, but Cicely knew that another reason lay at the back of her mother's mind. From now on she would be expected to play the part of bride-elect. Lady Selina, coming early to Cicely's bedroom, had said gently:

"I am sure that our dear boy would urge you not to wear black. I feel at this moment that he is sharing our great

Digitized by Google

joy. And you owe it to Arthur to make yourself look as nice as possible."

"Very well, Mother."

That appeared to be the only answer possible to dozens of just such well-meant suggestions. Already Lady Selina had prepared an itinerary, so to speak. She had decided what tradesmen should be honoured by her patronage. Not a moment was to be wasted. The selection of a trousseau for Lord Wilverley's wife exacted undivided energies and a pleasant pilgrimage to certain shrines of fashion, where the high-priests would assuredly refuse to be hurried and harried in the performance of their sacred offices. Anything approximating to what Tiddy called "reach-me-downs" filled Lady Selina with revulsion. What her girl wore must be hand-sewn, hand-embroidered, stamped (to the understanding eye) with a cachet of its own.

Cicely lingered for a minute on the village green. Inevitably the thought rushed to her mind: "All this will be mine some day." For the first time, she gazed at the familiar landscape with an intimate sense of possession. Out of the present, she flitted into the future. Pious aspirations bore her upward and onward. She floated upon outstretched wings above a reconstructed and regenerated Upworthy . . . It lay beneath her, bathed in sunshine, an object lesson in the administration of a sacred trust . . . She beheld her life's mission accomplished.

Presently, as was natural, her thoughts swooped from others to herself. She could survey herself as bride-elect with an odd detachment. Indeed, for the moment she became a dual personality. The new Cicely in V.A.D. kit, alert, critical, conscious of the immense changes taking place under her nose, met the old Cicely, diffident, silent, moving slowly along lines of least resistance, the "Yes, Mother . . . No, Mother," girl, without initiative, without definite am-

Digitized by Google

bitions, content to follow, not daring to lead. This queerly-contrasted pair stared at each other. Possibly, a sense of humour played the part of common denominator. The old Cicely could smile derisively at her own frock! When a maid can do this, none need despair of her. The old Cicely was aware that she might have stepped out of one of the gilded frames in the Manor drawing-room. Gainsborough might have portrayed her exactly as she stood without fear of anachronism. She wore a big, black picture-hat. Across her bosom was folded a black lace fichu, arranged by Lady Selina, and caught together with a mourning brooch which held a miniature. Around her waist, cleverly twisted by the same tender hands, was a black watered-silk sash. To complete the portrait, and as it was unduly hot, she had discarded gloves for long black silk mittens. And she carried a small black silk bag, with her cipher on it in paste.

She could not escape the conviction that the old Cicely was pleased with herself.

Henceforward, she would be at peace. That remained the dominating thought. Pleasing others, she had pleased herself. And Arthur would be "good" to her. They would be "pals." The new Cicely observed that so busy a man wouldn't be in the way when he wasn't wanted. Some uxorious husbands bored their wives. Arthur had said that his wife would have a free hand. The new Cicely then proceeded to startle the old Cicely by the mention of—babies. After the first shock, the old Cicely confronted motherhood without blushing. Proudly she reflected that she had chosen the real right sort to be the father of the babies. Tiddy had discussed Eugenics with her. During her short experience as a V.A.D., Cicely had seen enough of men to discriminate between good and bad. Speaking generally, the Tommies had been splendid, but now and again an exception outrageously revealed himself a beast. By ac-

Digitized by Google

cident, Cicely had been in a ward when a patient was brought in mad with delirium tremens. And Tiddy, who was also present, said afterwards that the patient ought to be locked up for the term of his unnatural life, not merely because of his offence, but to enforce celibacy upon him. Dwelling tenderly upon her babies, Cicely recalled a crayon drawing of Arthur, taken when he was two years old—a fat, dimpled darling in a red coral necklace and holding a red coral rattle in his hand. Practically, he wore nothing else. Yes; she had chosen the right man.

Immediately, the new Cicely accused the old Cicely of complacency. Well, why not? At the same time, the new Cicely pointed out exciting avenues down which, as Lady Wilverley, she could prance triumphantly. It would be delightful to entertain, after the war, clever people, who—so Tiddy affirmed—could be lured into the country if you "did" them properly. Also, she would ride perfect hunters, and drive her own Rolls-Royce car. The new Cicely agreed with the old Cicely that it was possible to combine two centuries, the eighteenth and the twentieth, taking from each what was desirable and charming. That would be a real achievement.

Descending to earth, her still dreaming orbs rested upon Martha Giles's cottage. It stood by itself, tumbling over a corner where the village street impinged upon the village green. Even Lady Selina admitted deprecatingly that Martha's cottage was an eyesore. And in it lived Martha and nine children. There were only four rooms. But, oddly enough, Martha loved it, and just because of that Lady Selina had promised not to pull it down. Of course it leaked like a sieve, and the cracked walls streamed with moisture, rain or shine. At the back were the sties. Martha lived by her pigs, on her pigs, and with her pigs. Buckets of wash came as doles from the Manor. Kindly neighbours,

Digitized by Google

knowing that Martha's pride refused actual cash, substituted meal and bran. Martha's chickens and geese picked up what they could find on the green.

Cicely greeted Martha, and braced herself to meet condolence. Martha wiped a dry eye with a corner of a clean apron. How she managed to keep clean aprons on herself and clean pinafores on her children was one of the mysteries that defy explanation, like the Indian rope trick.

She said wailingly:

"Master Brian be gone to Kingdom Come, miss. You must up and bear this like a Christian 'ooman. Yas . . . I mind me when my pore Giles was took. I give 'un a rare funeral . . ." This was another unelucidated mystery. The poorer the widow the richer the funeral! Martha continued: "But after funeral I sez to myself, I sez: 'Better him nor me.'"

A wild impulse surged through Cicely to laugh. Happily, she restrained herself. She accepted Martha's statement literally, saying gravely: "Giles couldn't have looked after the children as you do."

"That's how I feels, miss. 'Tis God Amighty's marcy as we wimmenfolk don't have to fight these tremenjous battles. If we was killed in 'eaps what would the children do?"

"What indeed?" asked Cicely. "I hope you are well, Martha?"

"I be allers troubled wi' my sciaticky, miss. But there, a widder wi' nine children to fend for bain't able to enjy her bad health." She added obsequiously: "I be a grateful 'ooman, miss. I tells the little 'uns that they'd be lying snug in churchyard, if 'twasn't for my lady. We doesn't get all the milk we uster do."

"Oh, dear! I must inquire about that. Good morning, Martha."

Digitized by Google

"Good morning, miss, and thank 'ee kindly."

She curtsied deferentially to the heiress of Upworthy, the future autocrat, the dispenser of wash and eyewash. Cicely hurried on.

Exhilaration was tempered by exasperation. Martha Giles forced thought upon her; she invaded peace of mind, most dear to us after storm and stress. Martha presented a composite photograph of all dependents who accept doles gratefully with a very lively sense of injury if they are withheld or curtailed. Danecourt simply swarmed with just such parasites. And a year ago Cicely would have resented angrily the use of such an ugly word. It was almost as unmentionable as fleas or . . . Even in thought a Chandos could not assign the common, loathsome name applied to pests that a toothcomb removed from the heads of dirty children!

Why was Martha such a parasite?

Why would it break her heart if her ramshackle hovel was pulled down?

VI

Cicely ascended the white, shining steps of Dr. Pawley's house, pulled a shining brass bell-knob, and then grasped a shining brass knocker. But she didn't knock, because she remembered that her kind old friend was ill. The trim parlourmaid opened the door. Cicely's eyes, with keener powers of observation, dwelt for an instant upon a large, spotless mob cap. No hair from that well-covered head would fall into Dr. Pawley's soup. This shocking incident had taken place at Danecourt, in the historic dining-room. Lord Saltaire had almost succumbed, falling into what appeared to be a cataleptic trance from which he emerged to refuse fish.

"Good morning, Ellen. How is Dr. Pawley?"

Digitized by Google

"He's in bed, miss. Won't you come in out of the sun?"

Cicely followed her into the drawing-room, which seemed deliciously cool. The windows had been shut to keep out the heat. Through them Cicely could see the garden sloping upward to the temple. War had respected this sanctuary. It looked as it had always looked, meticulously ordered. And the drawing-room presented the same prim demeanour. Surely the parlourmaid was mistaken. In a minute the dear old bachelor would hasten in, full of sympathy and affection, taking both her hands in his, bending down, perhaps, to kiss her forehead, the customary salute when she was a child. To distract her, he would show her some "find," a bit of glass or porcelain, upon which he would hold forth with whimsical enthusiasm.

Cicely sat down. She was in no hurry; she wanted full particulars.

"It's his heart, miss."

"You are frightening me, Ellen."

"It's much better, miss. It's the old trouble come back. Me and cook said it would. With rest, he'll be himself again. You see, miss, when trouble came to the Hall—and about that I ask you to accept my respectful sympathy——"

"Thank you, Ellen."

"When trouble came to the Hall, it came to the village. We've had a lot of sickness. And the doctor single-handed . . ."

"A number of our people employ Dr. Snitterfield."

Ellen sniffed.

"Only them as has to, miss. Well, just a week ago, the master fainted as he was lacing of his boots. But he went about his work just the same. He fainted again when he was taking them off. For an hour, miss, he sat huddled-up like in his chair, white as death and shivering. I gave him

Digitized by Google

brandy and put hot bottles to his feet. His orders, miss. I had to help put him to bed."

"I'm sure you did everything you could."

"Yes, miss, with the tears streaming down my face. That night me and cook looked out our black."

"But, heavens! surely you sent for a doctor?"

"Yes, miss. Not—Dr. Snitterfield. I sent a telegram to Mr. Grimshaw."

"Mr. Grimshaw?" The name literally smote her. "But he's in France."

"Oh, no, miss. Mr. Grimshaw is ill too."

Pelion piled upon Ossa!

"What next?" gasped Cicely.

"Mr. Grimshaw ain't confined to his bed, miss. It seems he got invalided home with malaria or trench fever, something or other that jumps on and off."

"Yes, yes; please go on. You wired for Mr. Grimshaw, and he couldn't come?"

"Bless you, miss, he ain't like that. He came by the next train from London. The master brightened up the instant minute he saw him. And Mr. Grimshaw had his own way with him, you may be sure. And, of course, he took on Dr. Pawley's other cases. He's in the dispensary now. I daresay, miss, you'd like to see Mr. Grimshaw?"

Cicely could have shrieked at her: "Not for the world!" Grimshaw's presence in the house, the fact that he was within forty feet of her, that he was ill, that his fine work in France had been cut short, probably ended . . . these accumulative surprises simply ravaged her. She wanted to bolt out of the house, to hide herself in the bracken, to think, think, think, till order evolved itself out of chaos.

Instead, she said faintly:

"Of course I will see Mr. Grimshaw. Please tell him that I am here."

Digitized by Google

"Very good, miss."

Ellen swept out. She had a nose—what servant has not?—for a situation. Something in Cicely's face had stimulated curiosity. As she hurried to the dispensary, detached from the house, she wondered vaguely whether there had been "carryings-on" between Miss Chandos and Mr. Grimshaw. Quite likely, she decided.

Cicely rose from her chair and stared at herself in a sunburst mirror above the mantelpiece. She bit her lips and slapped her cheeks, miserably conscious that such actions were humiliating and condemnatory. Why was she pale and trembling?

Fortunately for her—or perhaps the gods took pity—Grimshaw was preparing a tincture that exacted time and attention. Several minutes elapsed before he entered the room. Cicely, meanwhile, had recovered her self-possession.

"I am so glad to see you," she said.

Sapphira might have envied her!

Nevertheless, the first glance at Grimshaw's face was devastating. He was thin and haggard; he had lost weight; he had lost entirely the bloom of youth. Contrasting him with Wilverley, he seemed to be all angles and irregularities. The bones of his face had become sharply prominent.

Grimshaw spoke nervously but incisively:

"You can guess, Miss Chandos, that I cannot say what I feel. Your brother has made the supreme sacrifice. My sympathy is for you, not for him. There are moments when I envy him. I have seen the best go joyously, as if it were, as perhaps it is, the last and greatest adventure . . ." He changed his tone, adopting the professional note: "Pray don't alarm yourself about Dr. Pawley. The trouble has been acute; I cannot disguise from you that it is organic.

Digitized by Google

He is perfectly aware of this. It means, to speak frankly, that his working life is over. There is no reason why he shouldn't enjoy many years of leisure."

"Thank you."

"I hope to get him downstairs in a day or two. It will do him good to see his friends. I need hardly add that he has accepted the situation with courage and common sense."

A slight pause followed. Cicely said quietly:

"Can you tell me something about yourself?"

He shrugged his thin shoulders.

"A month ago I was given my walking-papers. A nasty jolt! No man living, as yet, can lay his finger upon the bacillus that expects me to furnish him and his family with board and lodging. He is, I believe, a tropical beast. Anyhow, I have him in hand. He is less obstreperous. Ultimately, he and his brood will perish. The English climate will wipe him out."

"Ought you to be working here?"

"Oh, yes. The reasonable exercise of my profession does me good. In France, when a convoy of wounded came in, we had to stick it till the last case. Here I can cosset myself."

"You . . . you are thinking of staying on?"

"Yes. That is understood between Dr. Pawley and me. He urged it. And I have paid a premium which now I can't afford to forfeit." Suddenly, his voice brightened, he seemed to speak naturally, sincerely:

"You remember you promised to work with me?" She nodded. "I am looking forward to that. We shan't be idle." He laughed, as he added: "I hear from Mrs. Rockram that you are an experienced nurse."

"A bottlewasher. Still . . . I learnt a lot at Wilverley."

"How is Lady Selina?"

Without thinking, Cicely answered:

Digitized by Google

"Mother is wonderful. She is almost herself again. Poor dear! she will be terribly upset when she hears about more sickness in Upworthy."

Grimshaw, rather astonished at her light manner, said quietly:

"I feared that Brian's death would overwhelm her."

"It did, it did. But . . ."

"Yes?"

She flushed. The truth must be told; and a desperate desire possessed her to tell it, to put it behind her, to face this man bravely and secure him as a friend. He would be hurt if she went away, leaving him to hear the story from another. She assured herself that he had never *cared.*

"Yesterday, Mr. Grimshaw, Lord Wilverley asked me to become his wife."

"Ah!"

The sharp exclamation escaped him. Instantly she knew. As instantly he recovered himself. But telepathy had been established. *He did care!* He had always cared. Intuition revealed everything. Fate had ordained that they should meet just twenty-four hours too late.

"I accepted him," she continued calmly, wondering at her power of dissimulation. "And that has consoled Mother tremendously. This morning she is another woman."

"I wish you all happiness, Miss Chandos." His voice was as calm as hers. "From the little I saw of Lord Wilverley, I can congratulate you with all my heart; and him."

She walked back to the Manor with slow, reluctant steps. The brook that flows between maidenhood and womanhood had been passed.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VII

TIDDY AND CICELY

I

UPON the Sunday following, the last Sunday in June, Miss Tiddle mounted her bicycle and rode over to the Manor. Rain had fallen after a month's heat and drought, and a delicious fragrance was exhaled by fields full of new-mown hay. As Tiddy sped along, she told herself that she had been a fool. Being really clever, this reflection failed to annoy her. Everybody made ghastly blunders when they interfered with the lives and characters of others.

"A marriage has been arranged, and will take place in the autumn, between Cicely Selina, only surviving child of the late Henry Chandos, M.F.H., of Upworthy Manor, Melshire, and Arthur George, second Lord Wilverley, of Wilverley Court in the same county."

Arranged . . .!

The word rankled in Tiddy's mind. But that mind she regarded as fully open, like her round eyes which "took in," with genuine hospitality, everybody within her ken. Possibly this marriage had not been arranged. During Cicely's absence from Wilverley Court, Tiddy had talked much with the noble owner. And noble he was! The two had become friends. Tiddy, as we know, liked men; she had flirted with Midland "nuts." And these had not impressed her favourably, being, so she decided, con-

Digitized by Google

cerned with themselves and the colour of their ties and socks. Even young officers, gallant fellows, "swanked" too much for Miss Tiddle's democratic taste. And she had come to Wilverley Court slightly prejudiced against a man whom she had imagined to be quite other than he was. Arthur's simplicity and honesty delighted her. She believed that he, at any rate, loved Cicely devotedly, although he might be incapable of tearing a passion to tatters. Believing this, it was intolerable to contemplate his marriage with a girl who did not love him as he deserved to be loved. On the other hand, it was quite possible that Cicely's friendship for him had warmed into a sort of hard-and-fast, "stand-the-wash" attachment. As yet she had not heard of Grimshaw's return to Upworthy. A man with dark, disconcerting eyes had flitted across a susceptible maid's horizon, and then disappeared. From what Cicely, being a Chandos, had left unsaid, Tiddy was positive upon one point: Grimshaw had kindled in her friend the divine spark. He had become, momentarily, *the* divine spark. It was likely, men being so amazingly unobservant, that Grimshaw, engrossed with his profession, had left Upworthy unconscious of this. With all her powers of intuition, Miss Tiddle lacked as yet the experience which might guide her to the right conclusion. A profounder knowledge of the conventional class to which she did not belong would have revealed that obstinate pride which she herself was incapable of entertaining, which, if she considered it, she dismissed impatiently as mid-Victorian and idiotic. If, she reflected, Grimshaw had cared, he would have written to Cicely. She could not conceive, because for her they did not exist, the differences, hydra-headed, between a G.P. and a daughter of the House of Chandos. When a man touched her fancy, however lightly, she

Digitized by Google

"nestled up," as she put it, not flirtatiously, but with the deliberate intention of analysing the effects of intimacy.

Yes; she had been a fool. Mrs. Roden exercised clearer vision. Intuition, nothing else, had constrained Miss Tiddle to make a mountain of romance out of a molehill.

The odds were that this marriage had not been "arranged" in the odious sense.

Accordingly, Tiddy braced herself for the coming encounter, derisively prepared to do and say the expected thing. Cicely's artless prattle about frocks and bridesmaids might be hard to endure, but she would listen patiently and reply with enthusiasm—play the game, in fine. Then she would try to get a billet in France.

Just before reaching Upworthy, her back tyre punctured. Tiddy jumped off, got her repairing kit, and turned the bicycle upside down. She prided herself upon taking with equanimity what an American lady has called "the collateral slaps of Providence." To her dismay, however, she was unable to remove the tyre. It stuck obstinately. Tiddy became uncomfortably hot. And she wished to remain cool, conscious that Lady Selina's blue eyes would turn protestingly from any evidences of . . . perspiration. Why did open pores offend old-fashioned gentlewomen? Tiddy was turning this over in her active mind, when she saw, with relief, an approaching cyclist, identified first as a man and immediately after as a gentleman. Tiddy sent out the S.O.S. signal; the cyclist jammed on his brakes and leapt to the ground.

"You are in trouble," he said courteously.

It was Grimshaw.

Tiddy was quite sure of it. A mere male cannot hazard a conjecture as to the reasons which bring instant conviction to the female intelligence. Perhaps she recognized the dark, disconcerting eyes burning out of a thin, pale face;

Digitized by Google

perhaps she saw a doctor's service-bag strapped behind the bicycle.

"Tyre stuck," said Tiddy. "Can you tell me if there is anybody in Upworthy who could get it off?"

"*I* can," he answered.

She protested, but he went to work promptly, removing his coat and throwing his cap upon it. At this, any doubt as to his identity vanished. Cicely had laid emphasis upon Grimshaw's eagerness in ministration. According to Cicely, his knightly quality was conspicuous. Cicely, so Tiddy remembered, had used the word "halo," which had provoked a gibe from Miss Tiddle. At this moment she actually beheld the halo. A vainer girl might have flattered herself into the belief that bright eyes and curls were quickening these activities. But Grimshaw had not looked keenly at her, but at the bicycle. She knew that he would have helped the plainest maid in the village with equal alacrity.

"He's a rare good sort," she decided, "but he looks horribly ill, and why is he here instead of in France?"

To ask herself questions when another could answer them was not Miss Tiddle's failing. The situation began to interest her. She said casually:

"I thought you were in France, Mr. Grimshaw."

Grimshaw looked up. She had no reason to complain of lack of penetration in his glance. And his next words confirmed her first impression that he was quite out of the ordinary. Wilverley, for instance, would have looked puzzled, taking for granted he had met this sparkling stranger before and forgotten her. Grimshaw said sharply:

"You know me, but I have never met you; never."

She laughed, a delightful tinkle of sound which brought a smile to his lips.

"Are you sure of that?"

Digitized by Google

"Absolutely."

"Well, you happen to be right. We have never met. All the same, I know you."

"How?"

Mischievously, she continued:

"There are such things as photographs."

"There are. It happens that I have not been photographed for about ten years. I hate photographs."

"Then you have no idea who I am?"

"None."

Tiddy reflected that Cicely, evidently, had not taken undue pains to describe her best friend to another friend. However . . . !

"I am Arabella Tiddle."

Grimshaw remained perfectly calm.

"My name is—a—unfamiliar?"

"Not—unfamiliar. I have seen your surname on—on——"

"Hoardings. And in advertisements. Tiddle's Family Pellets. I am Sir Nathaniel Tiddle's daughter."

Grimshaw bowed, saying politely:

"I am delighted to make your acquaintance. This is much better than a formal introduction."

Was he pulling her leg?

"Miss Chandos never mentioned my name to you?"

"No."

Tiddy experienced a tiny, triumphant thrill. She had brought out Cicely's name plumply, and designedly so, the artful baggage! And Grimshaw had winced—*winced!* True, he recovered himself, swiftly, but a glimpse had been vouchsafed her, all that she wanted at the moment.

"I am her school-friend. We worked together at Wilverley Court as V.A.D.'s. I am on my way to the Manor now."

Digitized by Google

"Not yet."

She was delighted. Wilverley, much as she liked and esteemed that honest fellow, was incapable of subleties of speech. The "not yet" was immensely revealing. He *could* pull legs, she decided. That was a greater accomplishment than setting them. She began to hope that the recalcitrant tyre would not budge too easily. Grimshaw was hard at work on it.

The tyre yielded suddenly. To test him, and to test, also, her own powers of attraction, she said quickly:

"Thanks ever so much. I can repair the inner tube."

"The tyre will not go on again too easily. Where is your repairing stuff?"

He spoke peremptorily. And his attention appeared to be focussed on the inner tube, as he searched for the puncture. Tiddy stood by with the small box, opening it and taking out patches and sandpaper.

"What a good Samaritan?" she murmured.

His fingers challenged her admiration; how deftly they moved; how swiftly. What exquisite instruments! Involuntarily, she exclaimed:

"I'm sure you operate wonderfully."

Perhaps he hated compliments as much as photographs. He said with professional curtness:

"Ah! you have worked in the theatre at Wilverley?"

"No. But I acted as 'special' for three weeks—dressings, and all that. Miss Chandos told me you were in France. But I knew, of course, that just before the war you were Dr. Pawley's partner."

Giving the rubber solution time to dry, he explained curtly, with an air as if his concerns couldn't possibly interest others, that he had been invalided home and was taking up his old work.

"Do you like country practice?"

Digitized by Google

He replied evasively: "I like work, Miss Tiddle, and there is plenty of it here."

"Too much," observed Tiddy tranquilly.

"Yes; too much. A month of drought has played the deuce. Now comes the tug."

"You are speaking of Upworthy?"

"I am speaking of the outside tyre."

Tiddy had the impression that she was courteously snubbed. Grimshaw wrestled with the tyre, and prevailed. Then he righted the bicycle with a vigorous swing, and held it by the bars.

"Up, and away!"

"Thanks, Mr. Grimshaw, and thanks again."

"Not at all. Good-bye."

"Certainly not. Au revoir."

II

Tiddy had ten minutes for reflection before she reached the Manor, and she made the most of it. All that was feminine in Miss Tiddle became ebullient. She simply effervésced with excitement and the consciousness that the game was not over, hardly begun in point of fact. Romeo cared and Juliet cared. Destiny had been beastly to them. Sir Nathaniel's daughter snapped her fingers at destiny, and then extended them, placing her thumb to her tip-tilted nose.

"She cares; she must care; and so does he."

Again we are unable to divine how Tiddy arrived at this unshakable conviction.

"I must *butt* in," she thought. "Pushing is no good."

Stimson ushered her into Lady Selina's sitting-room.

Mother and daughter received her cordially. It was simply impossible not to like Tiddy, although you might

Digitized by Google

criticise her. She possessed that incomparable gift of raising the temperature of any room she entered. All Lady Selina's rooms were cool, even in the dog days, not yet arrived.

A superb engagement ring flashed upon Tiddy's eyes.

She congratulated Cicely with effusion, upon the sound principle of telling a good lie if you are forced to do so. Lady Selina purred.

"Everybody is so kind. Such letters . . . ! And telegrams . . . !"

"You like my ring, don't you, Tiddy? Arthur sent it down from London yesterday. He wanted me to nip up with him, but I couldn't leave mother, could I?"

"You could," thought Tiddy, "if you were engaged to the One and Only." Aloud she agreed graciously, "Of course not."

"Any news, Tiddy? How are the V.A.D.s?"

"Clean bill of health. You heard about Agatha Farleigh?"

"No."

"John Exton has been badly wounded—left arm amputated at the elbow."

"Oh, Tiddy——! I'm ever so sorry."

Lady Selina said calmly:

"So am I. My memories of John Exton are not of the happiest, but I wish him well—I wish him well."

"Agatha says that a truly united couple can worry along with three arms between them. John will get his discharge and come home to his father. Agatha means to marry him at once."

Cicely observed pensively:

"How odd of Arthur not to have told me."

"My dear child . . . !" Lady Selina raised a voice

Digitized by Google

as soft as her hands. "You can't complain if dear Arthur's mind is full of one young woman."

"We only heard the news yesterday," said Tiddy.

In a majestic tone, Lady Selina held forth upon the war. Would Roumania come in after this disaster at Lemberg? The farther the Huns advanced into Russia, the longer and the more disastrous would be their retreat. She had refreshed her memory and fortified her faith in the ultimate triumph of Right over Might by re-reading the history of the 1812 campaign. Tiddy guessed that Cicely's engagement had turned a pessimist into an optimist. Of late, throughout rural England, particularly amongst the landed gentry, faith in victory had diminished. A stale-mate was predicted by red-faced squires who derived all their information from *The Times,* at that moment engrossed with advertising our lamentable lack of high explosives.

"In our biggest factory," said Tiddy, "we are making munitions instead of pills."

Lady Selina was delighted to hear it. Presently, she said gaily:

"You two girls trot off! You want to chatter together, I am sure. I remember, as if it were yesterday, talking over my engagement with our old parson's daughter. She was engaged to her father's curate. That made the séance unduly long, because I had to listen to her after she had listened to me."

Cicely led the way to Brian's old rooms.

Alone with her friend, Cicely became voluble. Was she talking to disguise thought? The pupils of her eyes were dilated. Reluctantly she confessed that she had not slept very well since her engagement, now four days old! But Arthur was a dear . . . ! The most thoughtful and considerate of lovers . . . ! And generous . . . He was

Digitized by Google

bringing from London a pearl necklace. Of course Tiddy would be chief bridesmaid, possibly the only one grown-up. Children were adorable on such occasions. She had some tiny cousins. To walk to the altar followed by a troop of darlings . . ."

Tiddy said flippantly:

"Coming events cast their shadows before. I daresay children mean everything to you. Mrs. Roden showed me the old nurseries at Wilverley. She expects a lot in that way."

Something in her tone challenged Cicely's attention.

"How oddly you said that! Perhaps you aren't really pleased? You have never been quite fair to Arthur. Once you called him fat. It's muscle."

"That appeals, too—muscle!"

"Heavens! If I didn't know you so well, I should think you were sneering."

Tiddy exclaimed rudely:

"Come off it."

"Tiddy! Are you mad?"

Miss Tiddle, in her way, was a student of strategy. For many months she had read Mr. Hilaire Belloc's articles in *Land and Water*. She had faith in a vigorous offensive, shock tactics, beginning with a surprise.

She said sharply:

"I have met Mr. Grimshaw. I've talked with him."

"Oh-h-h!"

Tiddy's statement might mean anything or nothing. Tiddy, so Cicely swiftly reflected, was capable of anything, even if she achieved nothing. What had she said to Grimshaw? What had Grimshaw said to her?

Tiddy went on, relentlessly:

"I've a lot to say to you, and I don't want to be flooded out before I've done talking. Keep your powder dry!

Digitized by Google

If there's to be crying, I'll do it. I could burst into heart-breaking sobs at this minute. A nice mess you've made of it."

"I—I don't know what you mean."

Tiddy became melodramatic, not intentionally. She detested posing and pretence. Violence served to disguise her feelings. Cicely's miserable face, her utter collapse at the first shot, moved Tiddy profoundly. She had half hoped, half feared, that Cicely would return shot for shot, justify her engagement, swear stoutly that she loved her lord. Instead, she sat crumpled up in her chair.

"Swear to me," said Tiddy vehemently, "that you don't know what I mean, that this Mr. Grimshaw is nothing to you, that you love Arthur Wilverley whole-heartedly, and I will go down on my knees and beg your pardon."

Chandos silence . . .

"I thought so."

III

Tiddy walked to the window and looked out upon the stable-yard. As she did so, the big stable clock struck four solemn notes. In one hour tea would be served on the lawn.

After the heavy rain of the morning, a breeze blew chill upon Tiddy's cheek. But it failed to cool her mind, now burning with democratic indignation against conventions and traditions which had brought her beloved friend to this sorry pass. Was it an impasse? Had she driven Cicely into a cul-de-sac? When she did speak, what would she say? And what she might say was, of course, insignificant compared to what she ought to do.

Cut loose!

Could she?

That would demand an immense effort, something cat-

Digitized by Google

aclysmal. Tiddy had not been deceived by Lady Selina's surface gaiety, although much impressed by it as proof positive of what good-breeding might achieve. She knew perfectly well that Brian's death must have been a shattering blow. Lady Selina had plenty of heart. Because of that, because she loved Cicely, she had assumed a mask. Nevertheless, it was equally obvious that this engagement, evoking as it did maternal energies and solicitude, had tempered the cruel bereavement. She heard a chastened voice, slightly querulous:

"I *am* fond of Arthur."

Tiddy retorted disdainfully:

"I'm fond of chocs."

"Have some," said Cicely defiantly. "There's a box over there, Charbonel and Walker's."

Tiddy helped herself. Silently, she offered the box to Cicely, who shook her head.

"I am fond of you," said Tiddy, nibbling at a praline, "but I'm fonder of myself. That is *the* test. I shan't marry till I find some man who can make me forget how fond I am of myself."

Cicely considered this. Tiddy had spoken sincerely. Cicely, not sufficiently alert to weigh the effect of words, answered with equal sincerity:

"Arthur and I agree that the sort of—of feeling you speak of may be awakened—later."

"You sit there and tell me you have calmly discussed *that?* I suppose you told him that you had a sisterly regard for him. And then he said that he'd warm you up—*later!* Heavens! Why did he send you chocs? What you want is ginger."

"Say what you like."

"I shall. What you have done is indecent. There's a woman in your family, a first cousin, whom you never

Digitized by Google

mention. But I happen to know all about her. She ran away from her husband, who was a brute, with an actor; she bolted afterwards from the actor because he made a fool of himself with his leading lady; and she didn't bolt alone. I have infinitely more respect for her than you. What an engagement! Two babes in the topiary garden, fatly gurgling, dreaming that the Voice that breathed o'er Eden will bless 'em, devoutly praying that love will awaken 'em. Take it from me that love is too busy to waste his time upon such blighters."

Tossing her curls, stamping her foot, the daughter of the twentieth century glared at the daughter of the eighteenth.

Then, once more, she cooled herself at the window.

Cicely moistened her lips with a feverish tongue. Anger had engendered anger. She was tempted to say, with frigid dignity: "That will do. Please go."

One consideration restrained her. Tiddy was fond of her. She might have abused friendship, strained it to breaking-point, but no girl would have spoken with such fierce vehemence unless she had been tremendously moved. To part from such a friend would be terrible.

Having reached this conclusion, Cicely became again a dual personality. Before, when this curious experience befell her, she had been conscious of an uplifting. From altruistic heights she had surveyed her world. Complacency had fallen, like refreshing dew, upon her. It was quite otherwise now. The new Cicely beheld with Tiddy's eyes the old Cicely. The new Cicely challenged the old Cicely to mortal combat. The new Cicely said savagely: "Tiddy is right—a marriage of convenience *is* indecent."

But the old Cicely was not to be vanquished easily. Tiddy heard her friend's voice, still querulous:

"You are horribly unkind. You—you are spoiling every-

Digitized by Google

thing. Heaps of girls, nice girls, marry without—without f—f—feeling p—p—passionate. And their marriages turn out jolly well."

She ended defiantly.

Tiddy, rather ashamed of her outburst, ashamed, also, to discover that her eyes were wet, said without turning:

"Those anæmic sort of girls are not in love with somebody else, as you are. That's what makes this thing indecent. What you propose doing is an outrage on Arthur."

Arthur. . . .

Instantly Cicely became alert. Tiddy had never spoken of Wilverley's lord as "Arthur." The name had slipped from her lips naturally and with a soft inflection that was unmistakable.

"Tiddy."

"Yes?"

"Look at me, please. I want to see your face."

Tiddy turned; Cicely rose. Melodrama is as catching as measles. Cicely approached her friend, speaking intensely, in what is called in theatre-land a stage whisper:

"You seem to be thinking more of Arthur than of me. Are you?"

"And what if I am? It's time somebody did think for him; apparently the poor fellow can't think straight for himself."

"Will you swear solemnly, as you tried to make me swear, that Arthur is nothing to you? You had the cheek to tell me that you could, if you tried, take him from me. It looks as if you had tried. And that, of course, would account for your extraordinary behaviour. Now . . . swear!"

Silence.

To be "hoist with one's own petard" is an experience that few escape. To accept such hoisting without whimper-

Digitized by Google

ing is difficult. Hence Miss Tiddle's silence. Cicely had put to her a question which as yet she had not put to herself. It fell, devastatingly, into the well where Truth hides herself from a mendacious world.

"If you say nothing I shall think what I please."

Tiddy pulled herself together.

"You are forcing me to be honest, not with you, but with myself. I have not tried to take Arthur from you."

"Could he"—Cicely's voice was relentless—"could he, if he were free, be more to you than a friend?"

Tiddy squirmed.

"I—I don't know," she admitted. "Really, this is ridiculous, preposterous. If I apply to myself my own test, I can swear truthfully that I am fonder of myself than Arthur. There!"

Cicely returned to her chair, sank into it, and stared at the carpet. This was one of her tricks, an idiosyncrasy that occasionally exasperated Lady Selina. She went into the same sort of trance that afflicted Lord Saltaire when he found a hair in his soup. Cicely had found a hair in her soup.

Tiddy could not guess that the two Cicelys were locked together at strangle-grips—a fight to a finish.

She cooled herself for the third time at the window.

IV

Minutes, hours, years glided by.

What a tiresome world it was!

Presently Cicely sighed. Tiddy exclaimed maliciously:

"The sleeping Beauty wakes after a trance of one hundred years."

"Yes. I am awake," replied Cicely tranquilly.

The girls eyed each other. Tiddy had to admit that Cicely

Digitized by Google

was awake—wide awake. Something sparkled in her eyes which Tiddy recognised with astonishment as determination—something, too, not absolutely unfamiliar. Ah, she had it. Cicely was looking at her with exactly the same expression that informed the portrait of her father—a portrait acclaimed by Lady Selina as a "speaking" likeness. A banal phrase now invested with new significance. Arthur Wilverley, describing the late Henry Chandos to Miss Tiddle, had said: "I never saw the old boy funk an ugly fence if his hounds were on the other side of it."

"I shall break off this engagement," said Cicely.

"Cis!"

"Nothing else is possible."

"Well, I must say you are wonderful—*wonderful!*"

"I must be—decent. I loathe indecency. I suppose I looked—peeped—at this marriage through drawn blinds. You have pulled them up. And I'm much obliged to you."

"You—you forgive me, Cis? I know that I rampaged like—like a factory girl."

"You did, thank God!"

Solemnly they kissed. Once more Miss Tiddle, not Cicely, wiped away two trickling tears. Cicely, as tranquilly as before, said:

"Nothing remains but to think out, if we can, the easiest way of breaking this to mother and—and Arthur."

Tiddy noticed that Cicely put her mother first.

"There will be appalling ructions."

"There won't be ructions. I could buck up against ructions. Mother never rages when she feels things deeply. She glumps, as you accuse me of doing. She will look at me in stony silence. She will become more forlorn than ever. I've been a wicked fool. What time is it?"

"Half-past four."

"We must make this tea pleasant." Tiddy nodded, too

Digitized by Google

overcome for speech. "To-night—she always comes to me at night since my engagement—I shall tell her."

"What?"

"Ah! What? If you can suggest anything?"

Tiddy sat down, placed her head between her hands, and stared in her turn at the pattern on the carpet, which happened to be pale roses upon a pale grey ground. Lady Selina had chosen it. Cicely walked to the open window, astoundingly self-possessed.

After a minute's concentrated thought Tiddy said quickly.

"You can't tell her about Mr. Grimshaw?"

"Heavens, no! Do you think I'm breaking from Arthur with the deliberate intention of—of engaging myself to somebody else?"

"Aren't you? You do care for him; he must care for you. And there you are!"

Chandos silence. Tiddy continued:

"I understand that it would be tactless to mention Mr. Grimshaw to Lady Selina, although *that*—your feeling for him, I mean—justifies you, forces you, to break this engagement. I believe I should tell my mother. However, I am I and you are you. If I wanted a man, and he chose to behave like a dumbwaiter loaded with rare and refreshing fruit, I—well, I should help myself."

"I believe you would."

"I'm glad I don't wear your shoes, because I take a smaller size, but I try to stand in them. You can tell your mother the plain facts: you accepted a good fellow, not loving him. You find yourself unable to love him. As a gentlewoman—ring that bell—you retire as gracefully as possible and you invite her to help you."

"Yes," assented Cicely.

Further talk advanced them but little on the only way.

Digitized by Google

Tiddy and Cicely

V

A war tea was not spread that afternoon. Under the walnut tree, supposed to keep flies at a distance, sat Lady Selina in front of a table not groaning but pleasantly purring beneath pre-war delicacies. The Queen Anne silver shimmered delightfully—it seemed to say to Tiddy: "We impose ourselves because of our quality; we are of finer metal, less alloy in us." To behold Lady Selina making tea was a privilege. She disdained the coarser blends. Her white hands hovered, as if in benediction, above her equipage. The cups and saucers were early Worcester. Once a collector had said protestingly: "My dear Lady, these ought to be in a cabinet." Lady Selina had replied blandly: "Really?" In her drawing-room priceless bits of Chelsea were at the mercy of housemaids. To lock up such objects seemed to Lady Selina equivalent to putting a price upon them. It meant advertising your own possessions, inviting envy as well as admiration. The *vieille souche* took all that for granted. Age, not rarity, sanctified porcelain and furniture—age and use. There is a story of some duke who asked the village curate if he liked the ducal claret. The curate replied thoughtlessly: "It's very good, your Grace." Whereupon the great man growled out: "I didn't ask you, sir, if my claret was good; I asked you if you liked it." In this same spirit Lady Selina surveyed all guests. She hoped graciously that they liked their entertainment. If they didn't she remained blandly indifferent.

The girls were not called upon to dissemble much. Lady Selina talked; they listened politely. Her theme happened to be the treatment of her own order in current fiction and on the stage. She contended that justice had not been done to the upper classes. Dickens had imposed caricatures, such as Lord Frederick Verisopht and Sir Mulberry Hawk,

Digitized by Google

upon an immense public, who accepted them as portraits. And ever since men with no more real knowledge of the subject than Dickens had "played to the gallery" in absurd endeavours to present lords as silly and baronets as wicked. "We have our faults," said Lady Selina, with a bleak smile, "but we are not more foolish or wicked than others. If some of us hide our vices we don't advertise our virtues. This setting of class against class is criminal. If it ends, as my poor brother predicts, in a débâcle for us within a few years, some other class—Labour, if you like—will establish a new tyranny far more unendurable than the old. And always there will be distinctions. They flourish, so I am told, most vigorously amongst the unprivileged. They grow rankly, as I know, in the servants' hall."

"And in a Red Cross hospital," added Tiddy. "But don't you think, Lady Selina, that the overlapping of the classes is a good thing?"

"No, I don't my dear."

"The House of Lords, for instance, is representative of all classes."

"And you do away with it! I for one have never objected to the infusion of fresh blood into the Upper House. Let supreme distinction be ennobled. That is a very different thing from putting beggars on horseback."

As she spoke Stimson was seen approaching, followed by a male visitor.

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Lady Selina. "Stimson was told that we are not at home."

"It's Mr. Grimshaw," said Cicely.

Lady Selina's brow grew smooth again. She might be "not at home" to a county magnate, but her own people were never turned from her door. Mr. Grimshaw, stepping into what Cicely had called Dr. Pawley's list slippers, had become, ex officio, one of her people. More, since Cicely's

Digitized by Google

engagement she had reinstated him honourably as "my boy's friend."

"He is bringing us good news of Dr. Pawley."

She welcomed Grimshaw delightfully, so Tiddy thought. But the young man did not acquit himself quite adequately. He appeared to be slightly brusque and ill at ease. Was it possible that he kowtowed to the lady of the manor? Or, more likely hypothesis, was he embarrassed in the presence of Cicely? He accepted a cup of tea under pressure, and seated himself beside his hostess. Yes, Dr. Pawley was in his garden, convalescent. The faithful Ellen held him under a watchful eye. He would remain in his chair till Grimshaw returned.

"I am very glad to hear such a good account of my dear old friend. Will you allow me to see him to-morrow?"

"Certainly. He is looking forward to that."

"Through him," Lady Selina continued graciously, "we have heard of you and your work in France. . . ."

She went on suavely, but Grimshaw responded in monosyllables. It occurred to Tiddy that this visit might be professional. Grimshaw was not behaving as a visitor. Tiddy jumped up.

"I must be off," she declared.

But in Melshire all leave-takings are protracted. Five minutes elapsed before Miss Tiddle mounted her bicycle. Cicely accompanied her to the front door.

"Are you weakening?" asked Tiddy.

"No."

"Your mother was sweet to Mr. Grimshaw."

"She is sweet to all her subjects. He is now a subject. To-morrow he will be regarded as an object. You heard what she said about the overlapping of class distinctions? A shot at me."

"I took it to myself, Cis."

Digitized by Google

"It was meant for me—or, rather, for the future Lady Wilverley."

"One last word, Cis. I repeat—you are wonderful. Now, if it will help at all, pile up the agony on me."

"And lose you? I can't risk that. Besides, my trump card with mother will be that I am acting on my own, as I am. You are a brick, all the same."

Tiddy sped down the drive.

As she pedalled away she remembered that Grimshaw had not alluded to their meeting just outside Upworthy. Cicely had murmured coolly to him: "You have met Miss Tiddle?" and he had bowed. She wondered whether a clever man was aware that he had given himself away with a wince?

VI

Left alone with Lady Selina, Grimshaw gave the real reason for his visit.

"I am placed in an abominable situation," he said abruptly. "You will believe, Lady Selina, that I should not bother you on Sunday afternoon without some cause."

"Yes, yes; pray enlighten me."

"Do you know anything about our professional etiquette?"

"Absolutely nothing, Mr. Grimshaw."

He made a gesture which might mean that ladies of manors should know more than they usually did about matters that might concern them intimately. But he spoke temperately, avoiding medical terminology:

"Put briefly, it is this: No doctor interferes with another qualified practitioner in the exercise of his profession."

"I understand."

"Unhappily, opinions differ as to a man's qualifications. Legally speaking, Dr. Snitterfield is a qualified practitioner."

Digitized by Google

Lady Selina, unable to wean her mind from Dr. Snitterfield and decanter stoppers, said blandly:

"I barely know Dr. Snitterfield. He is not, of course, a gentleman. His practice is confined, I imagine, to—to those who are unable to employ you or Dr. Pawley."

Grimshaw brightened. Obviously Lady Selina did not hold Dr. Snitterfield in high esteem. He continued:

"This afternoon I was visiting a patient—one of the Burbles."

"Not my dear old Nicodemus?"

"Not Nicodemus—a niece of his. She told me that her father was in great pain, suffering horribly. I admit frankly that I ought to have asked her if some other doctor was attending him. My excuse—if it be an excuse—is that I was much rushed, also I have hardly had time to pick up the threads of Dr. Pawley's practice. I supposed that my patient's father, living in the same house, had been attended by Dr. Pawley."

"Quite naturally."

"So I went up. I found the old fellow in the most shocking condition—a mass of bedsores, and suffering from an abscess in the hip."

"Perfectly horrible!"

"With the greatest reluctance, I must still further lacerate your feelings. It seems that two months ago the man broke his leg. Dr. Snitterfield refused to set it, partly on account of the man's age—he is over seventy—and partly because of the hip disease. I can assure you positively that his leg could have been set two months ago. Ever since he has lain there, most shamefully neglected. Probably he will die of the bedsores."

"I am inexpressibly shocked, Mr. Grimshaw."

"I knew you would be."

"But I don't quite understand what I can do."

Digitized by Google

"This poor old fellow requires constant attention. If I take over the case Dr. Snitterfield will be furious. I care nothing about that. I propose to take it over—I have taken it over."

"With my cordial approval."

"Thanks. This, however, is not the only case of disgraceful neglect on the part of Dr. Snitterfield. I could cite others, but for the moment I'll spare you. The point is this: Action should be taken against Snitterfield."

"How?"

"I can ask the chief medical officer at Melchester to come here and investigate these cases himself."

For the first time Lady Selina displayed uneasiness. She had, as we know, a nose for approaching trouble. In a vague way she divined that Grimshaw himself had reasons against the summoning of authority. However, she said suavely:

"If you deem that necessary it must be done."

Grimshaw hesitated. Would Lady Selina stand plain speech? Ought he to be—diplomatic? He could see lines of suffering upon her face. The pink glow that had suffused it at tea-time was gone. The fingers of her hands were trembling. He decided to pick his way as cautiously as possible.

"Dr. Snitterfield is, of course, our local health officer. That adds enormously to his responsibility. He would lose his job if his chief did come here."

"I will take your word for that."

"Perhaps, Lady Selina, you are not aware that Snitterfield was appointed by the district council?"

"If you say so it is so."

"Your bailiff, John Gridley, was chairman of the council at the time of Snitterfield's appointment and is still."

Light was dawning upon Lady Selina. She blinked.

Digitized by Google

"I—I see."

"I cannot disguise from you—it would be criminal on my part to do so—that Snitterfield has powerful friends, Gridley amongst the number, and several of your farmers. From my knowledge of the chief, his investigation, if he comes to Upworthy, will be thorough. I fear that the results of his investigation would become public property. The Radical Press might take the matter up."

"The Radical Press!" The light was now so intolerably strong that Lady Selina closed her eyes.

"In short, you, as lady of the manor, would be exposed to much hostile criticism and inevitable humiliation."

Lady Selina opened her eyes, saying tartly:

"Humiliation is rather a strong word Mr. Grimshaw. Can you tell me why I should be humiliated because a local health officer is proved derelict in his duty?"

Grimshaw hesitated again. Why had destiny selected him of all men as an instrument to inflict cruel pain upon a woman already bludgeoned? Always she would associate him with her humiliation, for humbled she must be, whether the chief was summoned from Melchester or not.

"I wish I could spare you the answer to that."

She retorted shrewdly.

"You raised the question. You must answer it frankly."

"Very good. Such an investigation as I have indicated will involve the inspector of nuisances."

"But he is not appointed by me."

"He also was appointed by the district council. He is a friend of Gridley."

Lady Selina remained silent. She had just recalled Cicely's words, repeating what Arthur Wilverley had said. Obviously Arthur knew these unpleasant facts. Grimshaw went on inexorably.

Digitized by Google

"It comes to this: without your knowledge, without any suspicion on your part, these three unscrupulous men—Snitterfield, Gridley and the inspector of nuisances—aided and abetted by small farmers, who dreaded an increase of rates, have formed a sort of ring. They have all played into each other's hands and pockets. They have abused grossly the power entrusted to them. And, lastly, their most outrageous misdoings have been done upon your property and often under your name."

Lady Selina gasped. Grimshaw concluded quietly:

"Now you will understand why I used the word humiliation."

"I admit, Mr. Grimshaw, that I should be humiliated if I were convinced that outrages had been done on my property and under my name. But, in justice to an old servant, I must suspend judgment till I hear what Gridley says."

"He will have plenty to say," Grimshaw observed drily. "Meanwhile, whatever he says, action must be taken. I ask you to condemn no man unheard, Lady Selina, but in this case the chief medical officer will be the judge if he is called in—not you."

"Then you mean to call him in?"

Her voice quavered slightly.

"That depends."

"Oh? Then you have an alternative in your mind?" He bowed. "What is it?"

"I have come here to suggest that alternative. There is no man in this county who has such first-hand knowledge of rural conditions, good and bad, as Lord Wilverley. Privately and publicly he has power, more than he himself is aware of. Lord Wilverley, under all the circumstances, could, if you can persuade him, deal with these men adequately. It is likely that if this matter becomes open

Digitized by Google

to official investigation Lord Wilverley might be summoned as an expert. I don't know. He is an expert, and his agent is an expert. As your prospective son-in-law, he ought to help you, and, if he does, I am content to leave the issue in his hands."

Lady Selina smiled faintly. In a sense she was grateful to Grimshaw for this really invaluable suggestion. She never doubted that Wilverley would help her. And, by this time, she felt certain that Grimshaw was incapable of speaking ill against any man behind his back without due provocation. Nevertheless, he stood before her as a disturber of the peace. He had assailed cruelly her peace of mind. And, of course, as a reformer, he suffered, like all reformers, from excess of zeal.

She said petulantly, with a fluttering of her delicate hands:

"I will speak to Lord Wilverley as soon as I see him. Why—why has Isaac Burble suffered like this? It—it exasperates me. Had I known I should have dealt with Dr. Snitterfield myself. Tell me, if you can, why these stupid reticences exist between me and my people? I am approachable always; I want to help. Why couldn't Isaac's daughter come to me quietly and tell me about her father's condition?"

"You have been away and in great trouble. Had you been at home, probably she would have come. And Dr. Pawley was ill."

"There is Mr. Goodrich."

Grimshaw remained silent. Lady Selina continued, still petulantly:

"You answered the particular question. I was away, and these poor people never write—never! But I repeat—there are always these reticences; one simply can't get the truth out of them. And why?"

Digitized by Google

Grimshaw had almost exhausted his patience. He had "spared" Cicely's mother as best he could. He reflected humorously what might have been said, what would be said, scathingly, by the Radical Press if they got hold of such good copy. And now he was pathetically invited to tear off his bandages and inflict more pain.

"Do you really expect the truth from them? They all feel as I felt just now when I approached this pleasant tea-table. You smiled on me graciously, and this is my first visit to you since my return from France. I knew that I was going to distress you horribly. But I am independent of you. Your people are not. For generations they have suppressed the truth. Their fixed idea is to ingratiate themselves with authority, not—not to imperil the doles which they receive from authority, the doles which stand between them and actual want. One of your labourers has brought up fifteen children on just fifteen shillings a week. How has he done it? Because you give him a cottage and a bit of land, because you send milk and medicine, because you allow his wife to pick up fallen timber in the park. And he is terrified of losing these privileges. When you enter his cottage his wife greets you with smiles and curtsies, the children smile *under instructions*. A cheerful smile means sixpence. Do you—can you expect these strugglers to tell you disagreeable facts, knowing, as they do, that it doesn't pay, *it—doesn't —pay*, to make trouble? Their pluck, not their reticence, amazes me."

Lady Selina nodded, too dazed by his vehemence to reply. Grimshaw glanced at his watch, muttered something about Pawley, and was striding across the lawn before the lady of the manor had recovered her powers of speech.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VIII

PEARLS OF DEW

I

CICELY noticed that her mother was unusually silent during dinner, and that she trifled with her food. Since Cicely's engagement the cook, a trusty retainer, had been given a freer hand with eggs and butter. Possibly the Spartan fare at Danecourt Abbey had been too much for Lady Selina. More probably, so Cicely reflected, the bride of Arthur Wilverley must be brought to the post in proper condition. Stimson waited upon her with even greater deference and assiduity. It was almost pathetic to witness his activities, deprived of two footmen. He had asked Lady Selina, almost with tears in his voice, not to engage a parlourmaid. And when Cicely had asked promptly: "Do you object to a parlourmaid, Stimson?" he had replied mournfully: "It means, miss, a loss of dignity. I can manage very well."

Not till he had left the dining-room did the lady of the manor speak of Grimshaw and his visit. She recited the essential facts truthfully, but they were presented with the usual Chandos gloss and with a note of petulance which Cicely could understand and with which, also, she could sympathise. The details about Isaac Burble horrified her, as, indeed, they had horrified Lady Selina. An awkward silence ensued. Then Lady Selina said slowly:

"He made a sort of threat, my dear."

Digitized by Google

"A threat? Mr. Grimshaw? Impossible."

"I regarded it as a threat, child—a threat which involved, as Mr. Grimshaw made quite plain, humiliation for me. He spoke of calling in the chief medical officer of the county."

In answer to eager questions from Cicely she explained what authority might do, and the publicity which his doings would entail. Cicely looked miserable. Noting her daughter's expression, Lady Selina said quietly:

"And then he proposed a happy alternative. For that I am very truly grateful. In fact, I can see no other way out of the wood. He suggests that I should consult dear Arthur, and through him his agent."

"Oh—h—h!"

"I dislike intensely asking Arthur, but I admit that he is vitally concerned. I need hardly add that I shall give Gridley a chance of pleading his case before I pass judgment, but I fear he has exceeded the powers entrusted to him. Anyway, he will have to explain himself before Arthur."

"I told you that Arthur does not see eye to eye with Gridley."

"Yes, you did. I am prepared for the worst. Arthur, no doubt, will insist upon my discharging this old servant. And how I shall find another bailiff in these times is a problem beyond me. However, I count upon Arthur and his agent."

Cicely felt dazed. But one lobe of her mind worked clearly. Arthur could show her mother a way out of the wood. He would do cheerfully and splendidly everything she demanded. Nobody else could do it half as well. And her mother was well aware of this, although pride would hardly allow her to admit as much. Lady Selina smiled faintly when she mentioned Arthur, and her voice indi-

Digitized by Google

cated maternal affection. Arthur, for the first time possibly was envisaged as a son. The other lobe of Cicely's brain refused to function at all. Out of a welter of chaotic sensibilities arose the appalling conviction that the breaking of her engagement had become a task beyond her powers. Dare she procrastinate? Could she permit her mother to ask such a service from a prospective son-in-law only to discover afterwards that the marriage so delightfully arranged would never take place? What would Tiddy say? She could hear Tiddy speaking, as it were, through a long-distance telephone:

"You are fairly up against it."

Then she heard her mother's voice, leisurely continuing:

"I shall speak to Arthur myself."

"He comes to-morrow."

"So you told me. I hope I shan't spoil his pleasure in giving you your pearls."

Cicely had forgotten the pearls. At mere mention of them she contemplated flight. Why not feign indisposition and remain in bed? Wild ideas surged through her head. Could she make a personal appeal to Grimshaw? The one old friend, Dr. Pawley, to whom she might have fled, for counsel, was physically debarred. Her mother said sharply:

"Don't look so wretched, child. I am positive that Arthur can save this abominable situation. I regard it as saved, so cheer up. After dinner to-morrow night, when he is smoking his cigar, I shall come back here and talk to him."

Having dismissed Arthur with gracious finality, she turned once more to Grimshaw. Immediately the inflections of her soft voice became querulous. In just the same tone Lord Saltaire bewailed the passing of the old order. All the Danecourts, in fact—and there were not

Digitized by Google

many left of them except Cicely's aunts—aired certain grievances in private. As a rule Cicely listened patiently enough to a tale—long as the Cromwell Road—which concerned itself mainly with the shortcomings of gardeners, grooms and tradesmen: all the many-headed who interfered directly or indirectly with that love of ease which Grimshaw long ago had described as moss. Grimshaw, during a few minutes, had raked a lot of moss from poor Lady Selina. Cicely reflected humorously, occupied though she was with her own affairs, that her mother presented the appearance of an ancient lawn cruelly lacerated by an up-to-date gardener.

"He means well," complained Lady Selina.

Cicely replied:

"Who doesn't? We all mean well. Mr. Grimshaw, so it seems to me, does well. Anyway, he never spares himself."

"Or others. This afternoon, for instance, he showed little consideration for me. He might have broken this shocking news more gently. And he knew that I was the person most affected."

"Well, I should have thought that Isaac Burble was that."

Lady Selina looked penetratingly at her daughter, and then blinked, unable to see her quite clearly. What was the matter with the child?

"Of course, that goes without saying. It annoys me that you should say it."

This, too, was a Danecourt attribute. A Danecourt cornered, a Danecourt at bay was likely to snarl. When Lady Selina missed a train she blamed invariably the railway company or appeared to do so. Once Lord Saltaire had summoned a man for using bad language. But, according to the testimony of others, the defendant was im-

Digitized by Google

peccably innocent. Indeed, it transpired that some swearing had been done by Lord Saltaire. When the case was dismissed Lord Saltaire remarked petulantly: "All I know is this—bad language was used; the fellow is a rogue and a vagabond."

Cicely was discreet enough to apologise. Lady Selina continued in the same aggrieved tone:

"Mr. Grimshaw is a radical. I deplore that."

"But these labels mean nothing, mother."

"Heavens! That a child of mine should say so!"

Chandos obstinately revealed itself. Cicely remarked tartly:

"It happens that Mr. Grimshaw does not label himself as a Radical. He detests party politics. I have his own word for that. Are you angry with him because he disturbs our peace?"

"Angry? And peace! I despair of peace anywhere. Still, one expects consideration from one's own people. And at such a time as this . . ."

She rose majestically and swept out of the dining-room. Cicely lingered to ring the bell and to pull herself together. How stupid to argue with her mother upon subjects like politics! And in a true sense Grimshaw was a Radical. He went to the root of things—an uncompromising reformer.

When she joined her mother Lady Selina smiled sweetly and silently upon her.

Alone in her bedroom Cicely attempted the impossible—an adjustment of utterly conflicting interests. If she considered herself, if she broke her engagement, Lady Selina would be confronted by the chief medical officer. It is likely that an inexperienced girl exaggerated the powers wielded by that official. But Lady Selina had made plain to her that ultimately the lady of the manor would be held

Digitized by Google

responsible for any abuses discovered on that manor. Already she had a glimpse of a dreadful photograph of her mother in some daily illustrated paper. And beneath . . . a scarifying lie! Her uncle, as a many-acred magnate, had not escaped criticism.

Lady Selina Chandos at the mercy of the Radical Press!

She remembered that Tiddy had hinted at such a catastrophe. And at the time Cicely laughed. And then Tiddy, resenting ridicule, had cited cases. According to Miss Tiddy, landlord-baiting to certain journalists was more fun than drawing badgers.

She lay back in her arm-chair, closing her eyes.

If she did not break her engagement?

She tried to sense what that would mean to Upworthy, her mother and Arthur—a feat almost equivalent to looking on at a four-ring circle. It is only fair to a bewildered, unhappy girl to state emphatically that she considered Arthur first and last. If she married him would she be perpetrating what Tiddy called an outrage on him? This involved, more or less, a consideration of matrimonial obligations. What did such a man really want from his wife? Did Arthur want more than she could give. Could she not give all that her mother had given to her father? And at this moment she saw Arthur with extraordinary distinctness, thanks, possibly, to the trouble that he had taken to reveal himself to her. She guessed that he had never been swept off his feet by passion. He wanted affection, fidelity, an atmosphere of domestic peace that would enable him to concentrate energy upon his work. All that she could bestow.

She felt strangely tired.

So tired that she fell asleep.

And she dreamed vividly of Grimshaw, although purposely she had banished him from her waking thoughts.

Digitized by Google

Perhaps on that account he took possession of her subconscious mind. When she awoke every detail of the dream presented itself with sharpest definition. She had been working with him as his wife in an enchanting intimacy of spirit and flesh. Interpreters of dreams, those who endeavor to explain the why and wherefore of the amazing vicissitudes which my befall us in our sleep, might affirm with reason that Cicely's mind had dwelt persistently upon work with Grimshaw. She had wished from the first to work with him; he had wished that she should do so. Also, she had thought more than she dared to admit even to herself of what it might be like to be Grimshaw's wife. One other point: she had never thought of Grimshaw apart from his work. Accordingly the dream in itself may be logically accepted as natural, almost inevitable. Her first impression on waking was the curious sense of reality that some dreams impose. Everything had been just right. She came out of the dream as a man may walk out of a playhouse after seeing a sincere and convincing presentment of life as it is. It is difficult, on such rare occasions, to realise that what we have seen and felt has not taken place. We believe that somewhere, somehow, the dream has been enacted. That, perhaps, is the great test of a good play.

She had dreamed that Grimshaw and she were fighting death and disease in Upworthy. Together they wandered in and out of cottages familiar to Cicely from childhood. The drudgery of the Red Cross Hospital fell to her. But in the dream this drudgery became glorified, equal to the highly-skilled labours of her husband: a partnership of mind and muscle. Her work, in its way, made what he did possible and successful. And the joy of the dream, the ineffable benediction of it, was this sense of working together for a common end. In the dream the hands of her

Digitized by Google

husband, not his lips, touched hers again and again, each time with an increasing thrill. He hardly spoke to her, nor she to him; because each understood the unspoken thought of the other. It was as if spirit and flesh had been thrown into a melting-pot, to be fused eternally. He became her and she became him.

And she had slept just twenty minutes!

The dream forced upon her what she had avoided—a more rigorous examination of her own feelings. So far, although bewildered and miserable, she had glanced at three rings in the circus. She had realised what marriage with Arthur would mean to Upworthy, to her mother, and to her husband. What it would mean to herself had been left in abeyance.

Presently she saw herself as Arthur's wife. She remembered what Tiddy had once said about loving two men at the same time. To her that was impossible, preposterous. If she resolutely banished Grimshaw from her mind for ever and ever she believed that the affection she felt for Arthur might bloom into just the same steady, work-a-day love that had sufficed her own parents. She would be reasonably happy and make him happy. She would adore her babies if they came to her. She would play gracefully the part of Lady Bountiful. It would all be so easy, so free from friction and discomfort. In her dream she had seen herself as the wife of Grimshaw. Now, wide-awake, she beheld herself as Lady Wilverley. But any image of Cicely Chandos, unmarried, regarded by her own kinswomen as a foolish jilt, always conscious of her mother's silent disapproval, was hopelessly blurred.

She undressed and went to bed. For hours she wriggled restlessly between lavender-scented sheets. Then she dropped off into a troubled sleep.

Digitized by Google

II

She awoke at the usual time, jumped out of bed, went to the window, and gazed into the garden. The incomparable freshness of early morning fell like dew upon her still tired mind. The rains of two days had been absorbed by the thirsty earth; the sun shone again in cloudless skies.

And Brian lay dead in France!

It was delightful to think that all her memories of him were happy. But why had he been taken and she left? What design underlay these heart-breaking separations? They had been so jolly together. But she recalled, with an odd pang that always, always, they had sought the sunshine and shunned the shadows. Love of ease had enwrapped them from the cradle. And if Grimshaw were right, if love of ease were a parasitic growth like moss, if it strangled other growths, must it be raked out ruthlessly and cast as rubbish to the void? He had said, upon that memorable evening when Arthur and he met for the first time, when subconsciously she had compared the two men, arriving intuitively at a right understanding of each, that some great discipline might change character. What effect had Brian's death had upon her?

She couldn't answer the insistent question percolating through jaded tissues.

At breakfast Lady Selina glowed maternally. No mention was made of Snitterfield and Gridley. A letter from Lord Saltaire was read aloud:

"My dear Selina" (it ran).—"I am rejoiced to hear of little Cicely's engagement. From my personal knowledge of Wilverley she has chosen well and wisely. I hope that I shall enjoy the privilege of giving the bride away. Tell her, with my love, that I shall send her a tiara. As I cannot

Digitized by Google

afford to buy diamonds, I shall give her the one that I chose for my wife, which does not belong to the family jewels. If you think it old-fashioned, I can have it re-set. . . ."

Lady Selina laid down the letter and said solemnly:

"Your uncle is the most generous of men. The tiara is simply magnificent—pearls and diamonds. It won't need re-setting. It was bought in the rue de la Paix."

Cicely murmured what was expected of her. Lady Selina read aloud other letters of warm congratulation, with a sly jibe at some of the well-wishers:

"Should we hear from these old cats if you were marrying Tom or Dick?"

"I don't know them, mother."

"You will, my dear. They'll attend to that. I see them licking their lips over your cream."

"If they are like that, I needn't know them."

"But you must. In your position a lot of boring, self-seeking people will impose themselves on you. But you can do with them as I did—entertain them *en gros*. Make your small parties as select as possible."

Throughout breakfast Lady Selina dealt delicately but amusingly with modern society. She had withdrawn from Mayfair after the death of her husband, selling the lease of a comfortable house in Curzon Street; but she had never lost touch with "the people who count." And you may be sure that it was not disagreeable for her to reflect that Lord Wilverley would pass thresholds with his wife which he would never cross without her. But she would have perished at the stake rather than say this.

As she talked, Cicely was sensible that the diamond-and-pearl tiara had brought down this freshet of worldly-wise counsel and reminiscence. Lady Selina's eyes lingered upon

Digitized by Google

her daughter's hair. She saw the tiara flashing and scintillating in sanctuaries where innumerable wax candles were still provided instead of electric light. The mother tasted again bygone triumphs. She ended in a minor key:

"Of course, society has changed for the worse. Half a dozen houses, not more, preserve inviolate the old conditions and traditions. I see no reason why you, my dear child, quite unostentatiously, should not enforce the golden rule."

"What is the golden rule, mother?"

"Slam your doors," said Lady Selina trenchantly, "in the face of indecency, impudence, and bad breeding. I admit sorrowfully that impudence can be amusing."

"Would you have me slam my doors in Tiddy's face?"

"Tiddy, as you call her, is your personal friend, and therefore the exception that proves the rule."

There was a letter from Arthur beside Cicely's plate, but she didn't mean to open it till she was alone. Lady Selina marked and approved this abstention. Evidently, school had not rubbed off all the bloom. She kissed her daughter after breakfast, pinched her cheek, and whispered:

"Run into the garden, darling. Read your love-letter in the place where your lover asked you to be his. My thoughts will be with you."

Cicely, however, out of sight of a pair of keen eyes, did not stroll into the topiary garden, but skirted it, making for the lower end of the park, where her beloved mare had been turned out. She would come trotting up at sight of her and rub her velvety nose against her hand. Sugar was becoming scarce, but Cicely had three or four lumps of it in her pocket.

The park looked invitingly secluded and spacious. Not a human being could be seen. The cattle were grazing on the higher slopes; the horses stood near the small lake, not far

Digitized by Google

from some clumps of trees, into which they would wander when the sun approached the zenith. On the edge of the lake, almost hidden by tall reeds and bamboos, was a tiny boathouse which held an ancient punt. Cicely intended to read her letter in the punt.

Her grey mare, Chinchilla, neighed and then trotted up. Cicely fed and caressed her, thinking of the good hunts before the war. A couple of bunnies watched these endearments, ready to pop into their burrows if a terrier appeared. Upon the surface of the lake were some wild duck and moor-hens. Overhead a heron flapped lazily along.

Followed by the faithful and sugar-loving Chinchilla, Cicely made her way to the boat-house and entered it. Chinchilla mounted guard outside. Cicely gazed, as some girls do, at the firm writing on the envelope, indicating—to those who have skill in reading character from caligraphy—love of order, a sense of proportion, generosity, and rectitude. Cicely had no such skill, but Arthur's handwriting pleased her because it was so unlike her own. And it never varied.

She opened the envelope.

"My darling little girl,—I shall have you in my arms within a few hours of your reading this, and I can think of nothing else. To have and to hold you fills my heart and mind. I can't add much to that, can I? Indeed, it is difficult to realise that you are really mine, because there is something elusive about you—something, in spite of your fine physical health, which seems to me frail and easily bruised. It is my ardent wish to cherish and protect you——"

Cicely paused. The sincerity of the writer was extraordinarily impressive. That would be his unswerving

Digitized by Google

purpose. He took care of all his possessions. Solicitude, henceforward, would be concentrated upon her.

Tiddy would say, shaking her curls, "Cotton-wool for you, Cis."

She read on:

"I have been glancing at some houses and flats. I am inclined to the latter—at any rate, until this war is over and the servant question becomes less of a nuisance. My own rooms are not good enough. My poor father had a hideous house full of hideous things. After my mother's death I sold it. I have the offer of a very fine apartment overlooking the Green Park, and have secured an option on it, pending your final decision. But you won't be bothered with details, and we shall buy our furniture together—make a jolly lark of it. We may have to spend some time in London, if my Government work becomes, as is likely, more exacting. The apartment I speak of is charmingly furnished, and we could, if you preferred it, buy everything as it stands. That is for you to decide."

The letter ended curtly: "Yours faithfully, A."

The "faithfully" was exactly like him. And no word in the letter was written so firmly, with such uncompromising up-and-down strokes of a full pen. Obviously he had intended her to digest its significance.

The letter dropped into her lap; she stared through the reeds at the placid surface of the lake reflecting the cloudless blue and the trees upon the farther shore.

Could life be like that?

Would it be life?

That morning she had decided to drift on with her engagement. All vitality seemed to have left her, after uneasy vigils and travailings. She had been born to tread the old

Digitized by Google

ways, like her mother, like all her people, except that one unfortunate who was never mentioned.

Probably she would lose Tiddy. And such a loss filled her with dismay and apprehension. She computed her debt to Tiddy. Tiddy had opened her eyes. Tiddy would go to France, and hurl herself into the danger zone, if she could get anywhere near it. Why was she so different from Tiddy?

III

Presently inaction became prickly. She decided to walk to the village and inquire after Isaac Burble. Mixed up with all her thoughts and speculations was this neglected old man who had served faithfully the House of Chandos. He had suffered abominably. Because of that it seemed a sort of judgment that Lady Selina's daughter must suffer too. The mills of God worked that way.

By the time she reached Upworthy the sun was nearly overhead, pouring down redhot shafts upon just and unjust. Once more the smell of the unclean animal assailed Cicely's nostrils as she passed Martha Giles's sties. Close by, in striking apposition, stood Timothy Farleigh's picturesque, heavily-thatched cottage. Mary Farleigh was in her garden, hanging out the Monday washing. Cicely beheld garments patched and darned incredibly. Mary's pale, thin face seemed paler and thinner; she looked an attenuated shadow of a woman, worn to skin and bone. Nick, the softy, was helping her, with a vacuous grin upon his round, amorphous face.

"Good morning, Mary."

"Marning, miss. A be-utiful marning, to be sure."

"How are you?"

"I bain't feeling very grand, miss. Tired-like. But I

Digitized by Google

allers feels that way o' Mondays. 'Tis the washing, I reckons. So you be marriage-ripe, they tells me."

"What be that?" asked Nick.

"'Tis something you'll never be, my pore lad," replied his mother, not tartly, but with pathetic resignation. She looked penetratingly at Cicely, adding softly: "I wishes you all happiness, Miss Cicely; you be a rare good, kind maid."

"Thank you, Mary. Can I send you anything? A little strong beef-tea?"

Mary's eyes brightened, but her thin lips closed.

"Thank'ee kindly, miss. I ain't much stomach for my vittles. 'Tis the heat, maybe."

Something in her face made Cicely say hastily:

"If you feel ailing, Mary, send for Mr. Grimshaw. Don't put it off till it's too late. He's very clever."

Mary nodded doubtfully. Cicely passed slowly on.

She did not hear very encouraging news from Isaac Burble's niece, who seemed to be more concerned—as well she might—with her own "symptings," as she called them. Her uncle, so Cicely gathered, had long survived his usefulness. The thought that mainly engrossed the niece was obviously the difficulty and necessity of providing a respectable funeral for one whose time had come.

Cicely insisted on seeing him, and found him fairly comfortable and cheerful. At any rate, Isaac was not contemplating his own funeral. He said with a chuckle:

"I be going to disappint Maggie. Yas, we Burbles be long-lived. Take a squint at Nicodemus. He was here along this marning. I told 'un I'd wager a tankard of ale that this young doctor sets my old leg. 'Twill be a rare joke on Dr. Snitterfield."

Cicely left him still chuckling.

Digitized by Google

Soon afterwards she ran into Grimshaw, although she wished to avoid him. He spoke of Isaac:

"I believe he'll pull through. The amazing thing is, he won't die—positively refuses to do so. If the bed-sores yield to treatment, I shall tackle his leg."

Cicely said tranquilly:

"I have faith in you, and so has he. It's too awful that he should be in this condition."

"Lady Selina has told you?"

He spoke with his usual incisiveness. Beneath his glance she flushed, saying hurriedly:

"She will consult Lord Wilverley to-night."

"Good!"

"If—if you have anything you care to say to me—something you may have withheld from my mother out—out of consideration for her, I want to hear it."

He hesitated. They had met in the middle of the green, and it was now unbearably hot, swelteringly so. Close to Farleigh's cottage stood an immense tree, with a seat encircling it. Grimshaw indicated this with a wave of his hand.

"Shall we get into the shade for a minute?"

Cicely assented, reflecting that she would remain in the shade for the rest of her life. She was torn in two by the wish to leave Grimshaw and the desire to hear what he might have to say. Must more horrors be faced?

She sat down on the rustic bench and furled her parasol. He stood near her, removed his soft felt hat, and began crumpling it between his hands. Her eyes rested upon his thin, nervous fingers.

"I dared not tell Lady Selina about the milk."

"The milk?"

Very deliberately, in his most professional tone and manner, he dropped the bomb.

Digitized by Google

"I have examined fifteen samples of milk taken from cows in and about Upworthy. All—*all* the samples held organisms derived from manure."

"Heavens!"

"Worse than that—some of the cows are tuberculous."

Cicely wailed out:

"How and why have things come to this pass? It isn't as if mother didn't care. She does. So do I—tremendously. And with good-will on our part, with—with the sincere wish to do our duty—why have we failed?"

"If I could answer all questions as easily as that!"

"Please answer me."

"I hate preaching. I hate indicting individuals. What is wrong here, and in thousands of other parishes, is the system. Peter is robbed to pay Paul. Compromise is the *mot d'ordre*. How can your mother or you know whether milk is pure or not? Of course, there is a man who is supposed to attend to these matters, a state-paid official. In my experience, most of these fellows—not too well paid, by the way—shirk their duties. Why? Because the foundations of the land system are rotten. Now and again a big fuss is made, and then things go on as before, simply because there is, as yet, no real awakening, no vital co-operation amongst land-owners. Many are good, some are outrageously bad—and they are ear-marked. The immense majority are indifferent, because they are ignorant. They simply don't know what ought to be done. It's futile to blame individuals. In a sense Gridley is responsible for the insanitary conditions in your pretty village. But I only blame him up to a point. With the best will in the world he would blunder horribly if he attempted drastic reform. Your mother would say that she can't afford to employ an expert, but, between ourselves, she can't afford

Digitized by Google

not to do so. And really it comes to this: if land-owners can't afford experts they must become experts themselves and teach their sons to become experts."

"And their daughters?"

"And their daughters. This war, of course, has made things, the bad things, blatant. All the farmers are short-handed. I see an immense change in cow-sheds since I left last autumn. What drainage was done is now left undone. All I have said, Miss Chandos—and I have said it under pressure from you, and with the greatest reluctance—applies to everything here. Snitterfield, for instance, would not have neglected a patient so—so damnably, if he were not overworked. In his way, too, he is just as ignorant as Gridley. If ever he knew anything he has forgotten it. And there you are!"

She thanked him for his candour. He stared rather ruefully at his crumpled hat, smoothed it, and straightened it, put it on his head, and laughed.

"I feel these things too much," he admitted.

"I can guess how you feel."

"If your mother will be guided by Lord Wilverley, all will be well. He is a man of remarkable executive ability. But, if you have any influence, entreat Lady Selina to give him a free hand."

"I promise to do that."

"What it will mean to this village is—immeasurable. And co-operation between two large owners may lead to the one thing needful—a more general realisation of what union can achieve. A league of landlords is wanted. The farmers should be asked to adopt a more definite policy, but most of them, again, are ignorant and obstinate." His voice softened. "All this is hard luck on you."

"They are fighting in France," replied Cicely.

Digitized by Google

IV

Arthur Wilverley motored over at three, bringing with him his evening clothes and the pearls. The pearls and Lord Saltaire's tiara had become, by this time, symbols to Cicely, symbols impossible to ignore. At a glance, she perceived that her lover had bought a perfect string, superbly gradated. It must have cost thousands! Their first greeting had been perfunctory. He came into Lady Selina's sitting-room and kissed Cicely. He was about to shake hands with Lady Selina, when she said impulsively:

"Kiss me, my dear son."

She spoke with such a charming spontaneity that he hugged her. And then he began to speak boyishly of what he had done in London, describing the apartment and its furniture. Apparently, it had belonged to a connoisseur, a collector, whose daughter, oddly enough, disdained Chippendale chairs, and porcelain, and mezzotints.

"I'm offered the lot, so the agent says, cheap. Really it's a gilt-edged opportunity."

"Not to be missed," affirmed Lady Selina.

Cicely dissembled. She had looked forward to buying the furniture of her London house, but she distrusted her taste. Probably, left to her own devices, she would achieve the commonplace.

"What do you say, Cis?" asked Wilverley.

"If the things are really good . . ."

"They are, they are. We should save time, money, and worry. I told the agent that I'd wire him."

"Talk it over together," advised Lady Selina. She added gravely: "I commend any saving of time and worry to you, Arthur, because I am constrained, much to my distress, to ask you to spend time and worry on me. But we will talk of that later."

Digitized by Google

With that she smiled graciously, and sailed out of the room.

"What does your mother mean?" asked Wilverley.

"She will tell you, Arthur, after dinner."

He displayed a tinge, nothing more, of irritability.

"Mystery . . .!"

"You hate mystery, don't you?" She spoke lightly, but he detected nervousness, and saw troubled eyes.

"I do," he replied emphatically. "But if this mystery doesn't concern you, my dearest . . ."

"But it does. Perhaps I had better prepare you. After all, mother asks your help, because I am so concerned in your giving it."

He recovered his geniality at once.

"If that is the case, dear, the help shall be given. Be sure of that."

She sat down upon the big couch facing her father's portrait. It was too hot to go out. He sat beside her and captured her hand which lay, he thought, too passively in his. Within five minutes he understood exactly what was expected of him, and rose finely to the emergency.

"Why, of course. Any possibility of a public inquiry must be burked. I know what to do. I can deal with the three culprits, Snitterfield, Gridley and the Sanitary Inspector. And I'll undertake more, provided . . ."

"Yes?"

"That your mother allows me a free hand."

"Mr. Grimshaw said that would be necessary,"

"Grimshaw? You have talked with him?" She nodded. "What did he say?"

She repeated Grimshaw's words almost verbatim.

"Yes, yes. Grimshaw is right. The trouble is deep-seated, and goes back to feudal times. Most of us muddle through somehow."

Digitized by Google

"You don't."

"Oh, well," he laughed, "I'm a bit of a carpet-bagger, and I've applied to estate management the methods which succeed in our big industries. The temper of this country won't stand much more muddling. As Grimshaw says, we land-owners must try to mobilise. And the old machinery must be scrapped. I told you once before that money is needed, the sinews of war. Because, mind you, this means war, a fight to a finish against inefficiency and stupidity, with most of your mother's farmers arrayed against us. I shan't have so much time to spend with you, Cis."

She pressed his hand, and then released her own.

"I have your pearls in my pocket," he whispered.

A moment afterwards the lustrous string dangled before her eyes. Instantly, as has been said, she appreciated the splendour of the gift. And, as instantly, she knew that it exacted a response. Why couldn't she fling her arms about his neck and press her lips to his? The fingers that held the pearls trembled; the colour ebbed from her cheeks.

"What can I say?" she murmured.

"Bless you! You needn't *say* anything."

She kissed him timidly. As it was her first kiss he may be excused, poor fellow, for thinking that the shy caress was merely something on account. Being shy himself where women were concerned, he accepted it gratefully, and with a restraint which made Cicely heartily ashamed of herself. He watched her fingers softly stroking the pearls, and wondered why she remained so silent. And all the time she was thinking miserably: "This is my price, or part of it. I am selling myself to this gallant gentleman. *If he knew it.* . . .!" The tiara would go admirably with these pearls. And whenever she wore them, the same thought would spoil all pleasure in them. Unconsciously she sighed.

"Why do you sigh?" he asked.

Digitized by Google

It was an unfortunate question at such a moment. Swiftly she divined that he was the sort of man who put such questions and expected them to be answered truthfully. If she let this minute pass, always she must dissemble, become an actress for ever and ever. And she couldn't do it.

Hanging, so it seemed to her, between heaven and hell, she glanced up and saw her stern father staring down at her. On his familiar face she read contempt, condemnation, derision. The Danecourt half of her withered.

Nevertheless, so persistently does moss cling to us, that she might have procrastinated, if sudden passion had not broken loose in Wilverley. The soft sigh inflamed him. He became, what he wanted to be, the lover of romance. It is invariably your shy man who, on occasion, bursts out of his fetters. He misinterpreted the sigh and the silence that followed it. He jumped to the conclusion that the awakening he had predicted was at hand. He would exercise the supreme privilege of the male, and infuse into this sweet, trembling creature the ardour that informed him so ecstatically. Without warning, his strong arms crushed her against his broad chest; he kissed her lips, her eyes, her throat . . .

In every sense of the word she awoke.

With a strangled cry she broke from him, and stood up. He rose with her, facing her, grasping the one essential fact that she had repulsed him, that she shrank from him. He said hoarsely:

"What is it?"

She answered him with the directness that had characterised her father. He had been a "yea"-or-"nay" man.

"I can't do it, Arthur."

He hardly understood her.

"Can't do what?"

"I can't marry you. It's simply impossible. It wouldn't be fair to you. I am ashamed and humiliated beyond

Digitized by Google

words. Don't torture me by asking questions. You are too generous for that. I wanted to love you, but it's not in me. It never will be in me. I ought to have obeyed my instinct in the garden. I have hurt you horribly; I shall make mother miserable; I shall be wretched myself; but I can't marry you."

He walked to the window. She was sorely tempted to rush from the room, but strength came back to her. She perceived that the pearls were still in her hand.

"And those pearls of dew she wears
Prove to be presaging tears."

Milton's lines came into her mind, as she placed the string upon her mother's desk. But no tears came into her eyes. She waited for Wilverley to turn and speak. What would he say? Would he attempt protest, argument, reproach . . .?

He came back to her.

"I am sorry," he said kindly. "If you feel that way, I—I admire your pluck. Of course, I was not prepared. I blame myself. I suppose I ought to have taken your first 'no' as final. I understand anyway that this last 'no' is final. Now . . . What are you going to say to Lady Selina?"

"Just what I have said to you."

He paced up and down the room, thinking.

"Shall I speak to her? It might make it easier."

She was very near tears as she faltered:

"How generous of you! No; I shall tell her, poor dear! The simple truth will suffice. She will say nothing. Her silence will be my punishment. Nothing, nothing will bridge that."

"You want me to go?"

"Please!"

Digitized by Google

He marched straight to the door.

"Arthur, you have forgotten the pearls. Let me say this to you. The pearls did it—and my father's face."

She pointed to the portrait, but it seemed to her entirely different.

"Your father's face?"

"Yes." She gave a bitter laugh. "He forbade the banns. I can't explain. It was something far beyond me. But I knew. And the pearls, those lovely pearls, were the pearls of price—my price. You understand? You pity me?"

He answered solemnly:

"Before God, I do."

Hastily he caught up the pearls and pocketed them. Then he held out his hands.

"Good-bye, my poor little Cicely."

"Is it to be good-bye, Arthur?"

He held her hands, gripping them. She saw that he was thinking hard.

"We remain neighbours and friends. I will help your mother."

She shook her head sadly.

"Mother is too proud. More punishment for me."

At this he smiled faintly, pressing her hands. He never appeared to better advantage than when he murmured tenderly:

"If you have done the right thing, Cicely, other things will adjust themselves."

He released her hands and went out.

V

Meanwhile, as luck would have it, Lady Selina happened to be in Cicely's rooms. Already she envisaged them as suitable for a day—and night—nursery. The old nursery at

Digitized by Google

the Manor was not too happily situated. It looked north. Lady Selina could remember the day when she had suggested to her husband a bigger and better room, but he had expressed positively the opinion that what had been good enough for himself and his father, was good enough for his children. He was no believer in coddling. And if babies howled, which in his day was reckoned to be a natural lamentation over Original Sin, let them howl next to the servants' quarters!

Now, with a more enlightened understanding, Lady Selina admitted that howling was no longer tolerated. And something told her that she would hasten, despite her advanced years, more swiftly to Cicely's babies than she had ever hastened to her own. Conscious of this, and able to analyse her sensibilities with an odd detachment, she smilingly considered the right placing of cots out of draughts, and the substitution of thick curtains instead of chintz. Chintz rustled when windows were open at night; flimsy curtains bulged inwards; a nervous child might be frightened.

These thoughts were put to flight by the soft purring of Wilverley's motor. And then, to her utter confounding, looking out of the window, she beheld Wilverley and his chauffeur, and, a moment later, the faithful Stimson crossed the stable-yard carrying a suit-case.

What, in the name of the Sphinx, could have happened? And where was Cicely? Had the dear young people quarrelled? As her prospective son-in-law, she insisted upon regarding Arthur as young; Cicely she reckoned to be a mere child.

Her heart began to beat uncomfortably, as a premonition of disaster gripped her. She sat down, trembling, realising that her hands and feet were cold. Deep down in her mind, possibly in some zone of subconsciousness, lay latent the fear that a marriage so exactly right from every point

Digitized by Google

might never take place. She had been aware, from the first, of Cicely's hesitations and doubts. But always she had impatiently dismissed her own forebodings as unduly pessimistic.

For a minute or two she sat still, unable to think articulately. She heard the motor leave the stable-yard. A long, dismal silence followed. Being a lady of quality, she realised instantly that Arthur was incapable of rushing away from her house without a word of explanation unless something quite out of the ordinary had happened. A man in his position might, of course, receive an urgent telegram. But, in that case, Cicely would have speeded him on his way.

She waited, knowing that Cicely would soon come to her own rooms.

Cicely, meanwhile, believing that her mother was quite unaware of Wilverley's departure, had not yet considered how and when she could tell the abominable truth. The paramount necessity of the moment was to be alone. Accordingly, after Arthur had disappeared, she remained on the sofa, staring at her father's portrait. She made sure that her mother was in the garden under the tree where tea was served on hot afternoons.

Presently, she opened the door, saw that the corridor was empty, and stole swiftly to her sitting-room. As she entered it, Lady Selina rose to meet her.

"Why has Arthur gone?" she asked calmly.

Cicely, completely taken aback, unable to temporise, faltered out:

"Because I have broken off our engagement."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IX

TIMOTHY FARLEIGH

I

LADY SELINA, you may be sure, betrayed at first neither surprise nor anger. She lifted her arched brows, smiled faintly, and murmured:

"Indeed! Am I to take that literally, child? You, not Arthur, have broken off this solemn engagement?"

Cicely, on the verge of tears, pulled herself together, retorting sharply:

"That's it, Mother. I broke off the engagement because really it was not what you mean by 'solemn.'" As Lady Selina, slightly taken aback, paused to reply suitably, Cicely continued with vehemence: "I blame myself for that. Arthur has behaved splendidly. I have been stupidly weak. I suppose it comes to this. I simply can't give him what he wants and what he deserves. If I married him, feeling as I feel, the punishment would fall on him quite as heavily as on me."

The sincerity and conviction of her voice and manner were not wasted upon a woman who, whatever her faults might be, was honest herself and quick to approve honesty in others. Lady Selina sat down, gazing intently at her daughter's flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes.

"What do you feel?" she asked quietly.

It was a difficult question for any young girl to answer adequately. Cicely made a gesture indicating protest. To

Digitized by Google

Lady Selina it may have indicated more. Perhaps at that moment she measured the distance between herself and her child. Perhaps she wondered if it could be bridged by a mother's kiss. Deep down in her heart anger smouldered. To suppress this, to use tact, to invite confidence courteously —these considerations burked the natural impulse.

"Have I not the right to ask you how you feel?"

"Of course. But could you tell me exactly how you feel? No. But I can guess how you feel—all the disappointment and vexation and humiliation. But you, being you, couldn't put all that into words. And it is the same with me. To please you—and I know how it would please you—I would marry Arthur if I could, but I can't. I have at any rate been brave enough to make that plain to him. He wouldn't take me now if I hurled myself at his head."

"You mean there is nothing more to be said?"

"Yes; I mean that."

Lady Selina stood up. Once more impulse assailed her. And, oddly enough, behind impulse, fortifying it, was the certain assurance that love would break down all barriers. Behind that again, a grim portcullis, was the impossibility of playing a part, of pretending to be other than what she had been trained to be. She told herself that she could kiss this unhappy child when anger had been exorcised by prayer and reflection, not before.

"I will leave you, Cicely. Before I do so I will say this: I would not force marriage upon you or anybody else. Apparently the knot has been irrevocably cut by you for reasons which you may wish to keep to yourself. However, a girl who changes her mind so swiftly may change it again. Before your decision is made public I entreat you to weigh well the consequences. Even to-day, when the world seems in chaos, no girl can jilt a man with impunity."

"As if I didn't know that! . . ."

Digitized by Google

At the door Lady Selina fired her most telling shot.

"One thing," she said slowly, "would excuse and account for your impropriety of conduct, to give it no harsher word —a change of heart as well as mind. If you care for another man it would indeed be wicked to give yourself to Arthur."

The door closed gently behind her.

II

Left alone, and reasonably certain that her mother had retired majestically to her own room, Cicely reflected that a flood of tears might wash away some of the more importunate thoughts that were attacking her. The conviction that Tiddy would not sit down and howl put to flight this reflection. Tiddy, probably, would attempt to fight reaction with action. Tiddy would work things off.

Le travail est consolateur.

No work lying ready to her hand, Cicely decided to go for a brisk walk.

She escaped from the house, and sped swiftly towards the beloved village. Instantly she became conscious of her freedom. A breeze was cooling the hot afternoon, rustling delightfully amongst the leaves of the beeches and elms. The world seemed incomparably fresher and younger. The sense of having done the real right thing quickened her pulses. As she walked she heard the stable clock strike five. It was tea-time, and actually she felt hungry and thirsty. She had trifled with her luncheon. To forego tea would be silly. Mrs. Rockram would provide it with pleasure. She stood still, hesitating. She might meet Grimshaw. But it was almost certain that Grimshaw would drink his tea with Dr. Pawley. The risk of meeting Grimshaw might be considered negligible. So she walked on nimbly as be-

Digitized by Google

fore, wondering whether Arthur had any appetite for his tea.

Mrs. Rockram received her effusively, but Cicely cleverly silenced an old servant's eager questions concerning courtship and matrimony.

"I came here to escape from all that," she affirmed positively.

"What a tale!"

"The truth and nothing but the truth. Let us have a good gossip about the village. I saw Mary Farleigh this morning. She looked very thin and worn."

"Pore dear soul!"

"I told her to send for Mr. Grimshaw."

"She won't never do that, miss. She's the sart that stands up till she tumbles down. I told her, I did: 'You'll carry on,' I says, 'till you're carried out toes first,' I says."

"What a way to put it!"

"That's as may be. She passes the remark to me: 'My time'll come,' she says, 'when I bain't needed so badly herealong.' And 'tis true. The dear Lord only knows what Timothy'd do wi'out her."

"Mr. Grimshaw must see her."

"She won't send for him, miss. But, maybe, he'd go to her if you asked him, as a favour like."

Cicely answered quickly: "I will."

Before she had finished her tea she decided that she would write to Grimshaw about Mary Farleigh. Also, she might hint delicately that reform in the sanitary conditions of Upworthy might come about the more surely if not pressed too vigorously at first. If her mother refused, under present conditions, to accept Arthur's help, somebody else must be found.

She was sipping a second cup of Mrs. Rockram's tea when Grimshaw came into the kitchen. To make matters

Digitized by Google

worse he had not had his tea. Mrs. Rockram bustled out, leaving man and maid together. Grimshaw was the more self-possessed. At once Cicely said hurriedly:

"I was going to write to you."

"Yes?"

"Will you, as a personal favour, see Mary Farleigh? She won't send for you. She looks wretchedly."

Grimshaw consented, adding a few disconcerting words. "What you told me this morning was heartening. Lord Wilverley is a man of tremendous executive ability. With his cordial co-operation everything is possible."

Cicely murmured, almost inaudibly:

"But . . . if . . . if he should be unable to help?"

"Unable?"

He looked so astonished that the unhappy Cicely found herself blushing. To save an intolerable situation she made another blunder.

"I mean if . . . my mother was too proud to accept his help?"

Grimshaw replied with a sub-acid inflection. He detested the waste of labour in making mountains out of molehills.

"But, frankly, Miss Chandos, is she too proud to accept the help of her own son-in-law?"

Cicely's eyes, beneath his sharp glance, showed a hunted expression. Why was Mrs. Rockram so long making a fresh brew of tea? Why had Fate ordained that she should meet this man twice in one day? What would Tiddy do in such an emergency? It is certain that Tiddy would not have looked piteous. Grimshaw's voice became tender as he put another question.

"Am I distressing you?"

"N-no."

"But, forgive me, you look distressed. It is possible, of

Digitized by Google

course, that my zeal for the welfare of Upworthy has caused —how shall I put it without offence—some friction between Lady Selina and you?"

She assured him too eagerly that this was not the case.

"But something must have happened since this morning?"

"Yes; something has happened."

Mrs. Rockram entered with the teapot just half a minute too late. Fortified by her presence, Cicely might have pigeon-holed further explanations. In a moment she would be alone again with Grimshaw, and some insistent quality about him would evoke the truth. And why not? Wasn't evasion the meanest weapon used by women?

"I'll make you a bit of toast, sir," said Mrs. Rockram.

"Please," replied Grimshaw. "*Two* bits," he added as Mrs. Rockram turned to leave the parlour.

"You are hungry, Mr. Grimshaw."

"Not particularly. It takes time to make two bits of toast."

He smiled encouragingly at her, inviting confidence, dropping his slightly formal manner and address. She said abruptly:

"What has happened is this: I have broken my engagement to Lord Wilverley."

"Good God!"

The sharp ejaculation indicated amazement—and what else? Cicely was too nervous to analyse her own emotions, much less those of another; but the light in Grimshaw's eyes illuminated his deeps unmistakably. He was glad—glad. And in a second an amazing change took place in him. He became the friend, eager to help and console. The two met again upon equal terms. Ten years seemed to drop from him as he exclaimed fervently:

"I knew it."

Digitized by Google

"What did you know?"

She asked the question calmly, although her heart was throbbing.

"I knew that he was not the man for you and that you were not the woman for him. I understand exactly how you drifted into the engagement. And how plucky to have broken it! He is such a good fellow that he made it less hard for you, didn't he?"

She nodded, hardly able to speak. He continued in the same boyish tones:

"And your mother? . . . I'm most awfully sorry for her."

"Mother is miserable, too miserable to scold me. And she is not the scolding sort. At this moment she is lying down—brooding. She will go on brooding. At dinner, to-night, she will be ever so nice to me, but the distance between us will be immense. Tell me how I can lessen it. There must be a way."

"You love her; she loves you. Pin your faith to that."

"And then there is you. I am sure that she will not ask Lord Wilverley to help her, and you . . . you . . ."

"Yes?"

"You see, you have held a sort of pistol to her head."

He weighed her words carefully, slightly frowning, as he wrestled with the issues involved. When he spoke no boyishness informed his tones.

"Do you ask me to lower that pistol?"

"I feel such a helpless fool."

"Well, if you want the whole truth, so do I. We are both in the same boat. As an honest man I have to face the fact that conditions here are getting worse every day. Action, to be of real use, should be immediate and sustained."

"I suppose you must do your duty."

Digitized by Google

"What is my duty? To better conditions if I can. How? That's the rub. That's where my helplessness comes in. If I rush things, kick up a horrid rumpus, shall I achieve my ends? I doubt it."

"Don't rush things, Mr. Grimshaw, please."

"So be it! And, perhaps, your mother is not quite so proud as you think. She may yet be guided by Lord Wilverley."

To this Cicely replied with an emphatic "Never!" as Mrs. Rockram appeared with the toast.

III

Two or three days slipped by without incident. What Cicely had predicted with such assurance came to pass. Lady Selina accepted the thwackings of Fate in silence. She remained consistently "nice" to her daughter. But she refused peremptorily the help that Arthur Wilverley offered within twenty-four hours of his dismissal. Before the week was out the usual announcement appeared in the columns of the *Morning Post*.

Upon the Monday following Cicely heard at breakfast that Mary Farleigh was sick abed and dying. Stimson told the tale.

"Dying?" repeated Lady Selina. "Did you say 'dying,' Stimson?"

"The word was used, my lady, by Annie, at ten o'clock last night. She had been in the village, her Sunday out, my lady."

"I shall go down at once," said Cicely.

"I will follow," added Lady Selina. "Probably Annie is exaggerating. Mr. Grimshaw thought that Isaac Burble was dying. My people, I am glad to think, do not die easily."

Digitized by Google

"What is the matter, Stimson?" asked Cicely.

Stimson, treading delicately, murmured:

"They say the fever, miss."

"Heavens! What fever?"

"Typhoid, miss."

"I don't believe it," declared Lady Selina.

Nevertheless, she filled a small basket with soup and wine, and dispatched Cicely with it immediately. Obviously the lady of the manor was distressed. Her fingers trembled as she tied on the lid of the basket, and she said nervously: "I send you first, Cicely, because I am aware of Timothy Farleigh's hostility. I saw poor Mary a week ago. There was nothing about her appearance to suggest this."

"I saw her too. I—I thought she looked ill, so ill that I begged her to see Mr. Grimshaw."

"Quite right. And has she?"

"I don't know."

On arrival at Timothy's pretty cottage, Cicely found Martha Giles and Timothy in the kitchen. Grimshaw, so she learned, was upstairs with his patient. Timothy received Cicely civilly but coldly. Martha chattered away as usual:

"Ramblin' in her talk, pore Mary be. 'Tis the fever seemin'ly."

"Does Mr. Grimshaw say so?"

"He bain't sure yet."

"I be sure," growled Timothy. "I know by my bees that Mary be dying, yes, I do. She loved her bees, she did. They'll up and leave the hives when she goes."

"You be daffy," said Martha cheerfully. "Mary bain't dead yet. I mind me when my lil' Willie lay cold an' stiff in his bed, and old Doctor Pawley he says to me: 'Martha Giles,' he says, 'Willie be gone.' An' the lil' dear opens both his eyes and says: 'No, I bain't.' And I speaks quite sharp to the lad: 'Now, Willie,' I says, 'don't 'ee conterdict Doctor,

Digitized by Google

because he knows best.' And Lard bless 'ee! Miss Cicely, Willum be cartin' manure this instant minute. I've some nice cow-heel broth for Mary, if so be as her pore stummick can stand it."

"I have some nourishing soup," said Cicely.

Timothy never thanked her. In the same apathetic tone as before he informed Cicely that his niece Agatha was coming to nurse her aunt, and when Cicely expressed her approval of this, adding a few pleasant words about Agatha, Mrs. Giles burst out again:

"Full o' beans she be, and quite the lady."

"Ladies be damned!" grunted Farleigh.

"Timothy Farleigh! . . . And before Miss Cicely too! You'll excuse his ignerunce, miss, I know."

"I've nothing agen she," continued the old man, indicating Cicely with a gesture. "When I says 'Ladies be damned!' I speaks of fine ladies, who toil not neither do they spin, and Solomon in all his glory bain't arrayed like unto 'un."

Mrs. Giles was unaffectedly shocked.

"I never heard such blasphemious talk."

"You'll hear more of it, Marthy, afore you find yourself snug i' churchyard. They do say as Aggie and Johnny Exton have fixed things up to get married soon as never."

"I think I hear Mr. Grimshaw's step," said Cicely.

Grimshaw came in, carrying his small doctor's bag. Timothy confronted him, a gaunt, eager man; all trace of apathy had vanished.

"What be the trouble, Doctor?"

"I am not quite certain yet, Farleigh. I shall find out to-night." He took Farleigh's arm, pressing it. "We shall fight for her. Go to her. Be as cheerful as possible. For the moment she is rather dazed."

Timothy went out, followed by Martha.

"Is it typhoid?" asked Cicely breathlessly

Digitized by Google

"It may be," he answered cautiously.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! And his children, who died here! How could he go on living in this cottage!"

Grimshaw, looking very tired and worn, answered curtly:

"Men like Farleigh can't uproot themselves. He is part of your soil. And—forgive my saying so—Lady Selina doesn't exactly encourage her labourers to labour elsewhere."

"Of course she doesn't. You . . . you look very tired, Mr. Grimshaw."

"I've had a bout of that malaria. It prevented my coming here, as you asked me, earlier. It's not easy for a doctor to bear patiently his own physical infirmities. Please tell Timothy that I'll look in again presently. For the moment nothing can be done."

He bowed and moved towards the door. Cicely was infinitely distressed by his appearance and manner. Did he deliberately wish to impose barriers between herself and him? Sympathy for him welled up and overbrimmed.

"Stay one moment," she faltered.

He turned quickly, standing still, with his eyes upon her troubled face. She continued hurriedly:

"I thought we were friends."

"We are friends."

"Are we? Surely friendship pulls down barriers; it doesn't deliberately build them."

She spoke so ingenuously that Grimshaw was disarmed. More than physical infirmity had been his portion during the week that had passed since he met Cicely at Mrs. Rockram's. Before the malaria seized him, he had lain awake hour after hour, fighting furiously against his love for a girl whose happiness had become dearer to him than his own. The issues were crystal-clear. Something told him that her friendship for him, so artlessly revealed, might be

Digitized by Google

fanned by him into the more ardent flame. The mere thought was intoxicating. Then in colder blood he began to calculate the consequences to her if he won her love. The mother would withhold her consent. It lay within her power to disinherit a disobedient daughter. And, unless all his knowledge of Lady Selina's character were at fault, she would exercise that power in the firm conviction that she was doing so conscientiously. All these considerations tore to tatters the primal instinct of the male to pursue and capture. Another thought distracted him and kept sleep from his pillow. Sure as he was of himself, of his ability to provide the necessaries of life, with some of its superfluities, for his wife, he was not yet sure of Cicely's adaptability to conditions widely differing from those to which she was accustomed. As a practitioner he had seen enough and to spare of the miseries brought about by comparative poverty. It became torment to reflect that Cicely, if she married him, might live to regret it. Add to this that he was proud and perhaps unduly sensitive. Finally, he had reached the sum-total of many computations. For the present at least, till his own position was more assured, he must mark time, an exercise he cordially detested.

He replied awkwardly: "If there are barriers between our friendship, Miss Chandos, they are not of my building."

"What are they—these barriers?"

"Almost as big and as old as the Pyramids."

He spoke harshly, angry with himself, conscious that he was dissembling badly. He went out quickly, leaving Cicely erect and defiant. But, as the door closed behind him, a faint exclamation of dismay escaped her. She sank back into a chair close to the big kitchen table, and covered her face with her hands. At the same moment Grimshaw, passing the open casement, glanced in and beheld her. His

Digitized by Google

quick ears caught a muffled sob. This was more than flesh and blood could stand. Cicely looked up as he came back. In silence each read the heart of the other. No words were needed. She stood up, trembling. He took her in his arms, kissing her hair, her brow, her cheeks. She remained passive, almost swooning under this revelation of feeling and passion. She heard his voice, broken and insistent:

"I want you. I want you more than all the world. I have always wanted you, from the day I first saw you. Is it possible that you want me?"

He found on her lips the answer to that question.

When they returned to earth she whispered:

"You didn't wear your heart upon your sleeve!"

"How could I, when you had stolen it?"

"Blind man!"

"Not altogether."

"What! You saw?"

"I saw the Pyramids. I see them still. I believed them to be unsurmountable after Brian's death, but when you told me about Wilverley I knew somehow that it was not love that made you take him. But the Pyramids remain."

She disengaged herself gently, raising rueful eyes to his.

"I had forgotten—Mother."

"So had I, for one blessed minute."

"What are we going to do?"

He answered decisively:

"I'll see her at once and plead my case as best I may."

His grim tone was not exactly encouraging. Cicely, however, nothing daunted, put both her hands upon his shoulders, smiling at him.

"I know," he said, smiling back at her.

"What do you know?"

"You are about to ask me to leave your mother to you."

Digitized by Google

"What a clever man! Frighteningly so. Yes; I have a little plan. How much do you love me, Harry?"

The name slipped from her so easily that he guessed how often it must have been in her thoughts.

"Ah! How much? I came back here, against my judgment, my pride, everything, because I loved you so desperately."

She exclaimed joyfully:

"That is how a girl wants to be loved. I am ever so proud that you love me like that."

She kissed him, so sweetly, with such self-surrender, that he asked himself, humbly and gratefully, "Am I worthy of her?" And behind the question rankled the fact that he had doubted her strength of character and ability to rise above conventions rigorously imposed since her childhood. He heard her soft voice, so beguiling:

"I suppose you know that Mother loves me very dearly?"

He laughed, pressing her to him.

"Well, I think I can guess what sort of strangle-hold you have on her."

"Since Brian died she has been so tender to me, and more dependent. And I'm all she has." She sighed a little.

"You would like to spare me," he said. "Your mother is not very likely to love me."

"If she knew you as I do, she would consent to our marriage."

"Would she? Um! My time this morning is not my own, darling. Let's hear your little plan."

"I want you to make love to Mother. You never half wooed me. But I'll forgive you, if you woo her. You must woo her."

"But she doesn't give me many opportunities. And, you see, I'm no courtier."

Digitized by Google

She stepped back from him, eyeing him critically, but still smiling.

"You aren't, if you won't try to do the first thing I ask you. But you will, won't you?"

"I antagonised her at the start."

"I can assure you she's getting over that. She admits you are tremendously clever. She says that you have resurrected old Isaac Burble from the dead. And you will save poor Mary Farleigh. Her illness will bring you together. When you meet, will it be so frightfully difficult to be nice to her?"

"And hold my tongue about you?"

"Her ways," she pleaded, "are not your ways, but can't you walk in them for a little while to—to please me?"

"What a witch! I prefer more direct methods."

"Oh-h-h!"

Tears filled her eyes. Feeling a brute, he kissed them away, whispering: "I'll do my best, dearest. Now, tell me, when shall I see you again?"

"I may be here when you come back presently. And to-morrow I shall be under the big tree on the green at six-thirty."

Grimshaw laughed gaily.

"What a coincidence! I, too, shall be under the big tree at that very time."

With that pleasant assurance he went his way. Cicely took from her basket a pint of port wine, some linen, and a small basin of clear soup in jelly. Whilst she was doing this, Nicky, the softy, came in and grinned at her knowingly. Cicely greeted him:

"Well, Nicky, how are you?"

"I seen you mumbudgettin' wi' doctor, I did."

Cicely exhibited slight confusion.

"Oh! How did you see us?"

Digitized by Google

"Through crack i' door, I did."

What he saw, however, was not destined to be revealed, because a sharp tap at the cottage door interrupted the duologue.

"Come in," said Cicely, much relieved.

Nick slipped out as Agatha Farleigh entered, followed by John Exton, carrying Agatha's neat suit-case. John was wearing khaki and a sergeant's stripes. Upon his chest was the D.C.M. After greeting Cicely Agatha said briskly:

"You remember John Exton, Miss Cicely?"

"Indeed I do. He hasn't let us forget him. We were so dreadfully sorry to hear you had lost an arm, John."

"I gave it, miss."

"You look very well."

Agatha glanced at the port wine and the basin.

"Is my aunt seriously ill?" she asked. "Uncle wired for me this morning. I got leave at once. I suppose Mr. Grimshaw is attending her?"

"Yes; he has just left. I am afraid it is serious, Agatha. It may be typhoid."

Agatha, without a word, crossed the room and hurried out. Cicely said to John:

"This is a cruel shock for her. You are still in the army?"

"With a month's leave. I was so sorry, miss, to hear about Mr. Brian."

"Thank you, John. It hardly bears speaking about. How is your father?"

"He's well, and doing well, thank God!"

A slight emphasis on the last half of the sentence had significance. An awkward pause was broken by the return of Agatha, somewhat excited.

"Uncle Timothy wouldn't let me in. Why did he send for me, if he doesn't want me?"

Digitized by Google

"Of course he wants you," replied Cicely. "Naturally, he is very upset. I will call again this afternoon to see if you want anything."

She moved to the door, which John politely opened for her. Agatha began to take off her hat. As soon as she was alone with the young man she exclaimed bitterly:

"Typhoid! . . . I expected it."

"Expected it, Aggie?"

"Regular poison trap, this cottage. Ought to have been pulled down years ago. I'll bet Mr. Grimshaw agrees with that."

Agatha's obvious exasperation was excusable. Her uncle's telegram summoning her to nurse Mary Farleigh happened to arrive at a moment when she was expecting to spend a well-earned leave with the Extons. Also, it seemed to her that John accepted her disappointment too coolly. Surely he must know that she was "fed up" with work. The equanimity of the trained soldier, his acquiescence in misfortune, his good-temper under it, would have provoked admiration from Aggie at any other time. Let us make due allowance for her. John attempted to soothe her, not very successfully. And then Martha Giles poked in her comical old head explaining:

"Well, I never! . . . Johnny Exton—a gentleman officer!"

John took her hand heartily.

"Only a sergeant, Mrs. Giles."

"With three wound-stripes," added Agatha proudly. Her tone became aggrieved again, as she added: "Uncle Timothy wouldn't let me in, Martha."

"Let 'un bide wi' the pore sick soul. She be tarr'ble low, dazed an' mazed as never was; but Mary be tough, and the dear Lard well knows that she bain't to be spared, no more than I be."

Digitized by Google

"Is there proper food in the house?" asked Agatha.

"Yes; my cow-heel broth. Hark! Timothy be comin' down."

A heavy step was heard on a creaking stair. Martha whispered hurriedly:

"Now, don't 'ee be miffed, if he acts flustratious, pore dear man!"

Timothy entered, carefully closing the door behind him. For an instant he stared questioningly at John Exton and Agatha, a mute, tragic figure bowed by years of toil. Agatha went up to him and kissed him.

"How is she?"

"She don't know me. Aggie; she don't know me. I ain't no use to her. Who's that?"

"John Exton, whom I'm going to marry."

"Aye, aye. You two do as I bids ye. Bring no childer into this world. Where's doctor?"

"He'll be herealong soon," said Martha.

"Doctor can't do nothink. I might as well get coffin-stools out."

"Shall I go?" said John to Agatha.

"Not yet." She addressed her uncle: "You'll be wanting your dinner, dear?"

"No; I wants my old Mary. I be fair lost wi'out she."

He sat down in the big worn arm-chair near the hearth. Mrs. Giles said in a piping voice:

"I'll bide wi' Mary till Aggie be ready to take my place."

"I'm ready now, Martha."

Timothy growled out: "You bide wi me a bit, my girl. I've summat to say to 'ee." As Martha slipped away he addressed John Exton: "Your father was allers my good friend."

"Yes, yes; indeed he was—and is."

Timothy thumped the stout oak arm of his chair.

Digitized by Google

"Ah-h-h! My lady turned 'un out. And she killed my lil' maids! . . . An' now 'tis Mary's turn."

John said quietly:

"Steady on. I thought I was dead in the trenches, but I wasn't."

Timothy rose up, lifting a heavy, misshapen hand.

"Gi' me the Book," he commanded, pointing dramatically at the big Bible lying upon the window-ledge between two pots of scented geranium. John fetched it, laying it upon the kitchen table.

"Where be my specs?"

Agatha saw them on the chimney-piece, and handed them to him in silence. With trembling fingers he put them on. Then he opened the Bible, turning a page or two, till he found the fly-leaf.

"I be going blind," he muttered feebly.

"No, no; let me wipe your glasses."

Agatha wiped his glasses.

"That be better, my girl. Aye." He ran his finger along an entry in faded ink. "Here we be. . . . 'Mary Jane, barn October 2nd, 1897, died June 7th, 1904.' My first-barn, a dinky lil' maid as never was."

Agatha, much moved, and relapsing unconsciously into the Doric, said excitedly:

"I mind her curly lil' head, I do."

"Ah-h-h! Here we be agen. 'Ellen Adeliza, barn November 9th, 1898, died June 9th, 1904,' just two days arter her sister."

He glared at Agatha. Suddenly his voice became harsh and fierce.

"Gi' me pen and ink, Aggie."

"Whatever for, Uncle?"

"To make proper entry, my girl."

John said softly:

Digitized by Google

"But the proper entry is there, Mr. Farleigh."

"No, it bain't. I be going to scratch out 'died' an' write—'murdered.'"

John approached him, saying firmly:

"Don't do that, Mr. Farleigh."

Timothy snarled at him:

"Be I master in my own house, or be you, young man?"

At that Agatha took his arm.

"Dear Uncle, John is right. 'Twould make Aunt Mary so unhappy if she knew."

"Gi' me pen an' ink," he replied with all the obstinacy of the peasant.

The ink-pot stood on the window-ledge, near the open casement. Timothy was staring at Agatha. John, standing close to the window, deftly emptied the ink-pot without being perceived.

"No," said Agatha.

"I says—yes."

John held up the ink-pot.

"There's no ink in the pot, Mr. Farleigh, not a drop." He held the ink-pot upside down, as proof positive.

"No ink—no ink," he mumbled, dazed again and irresolute. Agatha pushed him gently toward his chair. He sank into it, still mumbling. John's face softened; Agatha's assumed a hard expression. The silence was broken by voices outside. Timothy took no notice.

"Who is it?" asked Agatha impatiently.

John looked through the casement before he answered:

"The Ancient, Nicodemus Burble, and Nick."

"We don't want that old gaffer. Tell him he can't come in."

But Timothy objected.

"Let 'un in; let 'un in. All friends be heartily welcome."

Digitized by Google

Agatha shrugged her shoulders. John opened the door to Nicodemus, who entered gallantly, carrying his many years as if they were feathers.

"Marning, all."

Nick followed, and espying a newspaper which John had stuck into the strap of Agatha's suit-case, furtively purloined it, sidling into the ingle-nook, where he remained more or less invisible.

"Glad to see you looking so hearty, Mr. Burble," said John.

"John Exton, I do declare, and Aggie Farleigh! Well, well!"

"How are you, granfer?" asked Agatha.

Nicodemus squared his shoulders.

"I be the most notable man in village. How be Auntie, Aggie?"

"Very sick. I've not seen her yet."

Nicodemus greeted Timothy, and then smacked his lips as he envisaged the small bottle of port wine.

"Ah-h-h! Her ladyship ha' been herealong. Part wine, as I live!"

At once Timothy jumped up, fierce and menacing.

"Her wine? In my house? Gi' me that bottle!"

"We may need it," protested Agatha. Timothy pushed her roughly aside and seized the bottle, exclaiming with biblical fervour:

"Death be in her loving-kindness, and sorrow in her cups o' wine. I be goin' to throw 'un away."

The Ancient tottered at such a threat.

"Throw away good liquor! What an onchristian act! A rare churchgoer, such as you be, Tim Farleigh, ought to behave hisself more genteel. Throw away my lady's part wine! I never heard such hellish talk."

Digitized by Google

Timothy turned upon him aggressively, but the Ancient stood his ground.

"There be no heaven and hell, save on this earth. The quality gets the heaven, and we pore folks walks in hell. I be done wi' church-goin'—done wi' it for ever—done!"

He went out. A crash of breaking glass was heard. Nicodemus looked up to Heaven.

"Lard help 'un!"

To his immense amazement, Agatha snapped out:

"My lady's wine is poison to him, and no wonder."

"Part wine bain't pison, neighbours. Why not drink the wine, and then smash bottle?"

"Because his wife may be dying, Mr. Burble."

"Fevers and such comes from Providence, Aggie. I holds tight to Providence, I do. And I don't hold wi' talk agen the quality. That was never my way."

Timothy came back.

"What be saying?" he asked.

Nicodemus wagged his head solemnly.

"I don't hold wi' talk agen the quality, Tim. Her ladyship spends money on we wi' both hands."

"You tell me how much she spends," sneered Timothy.

"I dunno."

"I can tell you," said Agatha. "I was her secretary. I know all about her doles."

"Doles? What be doles, Aggie?"

"Soup, blankets, cloaks, a dozen or two of port from the wood."

Nicodemus looked incredulous.

"Part from the wood? What a queer place to get 'un. There be allers beef at Yuletide, milk for widders and little 'uns, a mort o' comfort for them as keers for cows' gifts. A gert charitable 'ooman, my lady be. Rich folk should be treated wi' respect."

Digitized by Google

"And what does it all come to in cash?" asked Agatha. "I'll tell you. About five hundred pounds—counting everything."

Nicodemus chuckled, rubbing together his gnarled hands, which indicated more than his face great age.

"A gert noble sum, neighbours. My lady has done her dooty."

"What hasn't she done?" asked John sharply.

"Dang my old boans, I dun'no."

"She hasn't pulled down a score of cottages like this."

"Pulled down cottages?" Nicodemus wiped his shining brow.

"They ought to be burnt—burnt," repeated Agatha excitedly.

"Aye," said Timothy, "and the Hall wi' 'un."

Nick's voice was heard from the ingle-nook, shrill and ear-piercing:

" 'Twould be a rare lark!"

Nobody noticed the boy. The Ancient thumped the tiled floor with his oak stick, exclaiming angrily: "What blarsted talk! 'Tis a fool's cap you be wanting, Aggie Farleigh."

Nick interposed again:

"I'll make 'ee one, Aggie."

The tension was increasing. Timothy's deep-set eyes glowered; John Exton, thinking of his father, and recalling old calculations, said emphatically:

"I've been into this. Upworthy ought to have fifty new cottages. At the old prices, three hundred apiece, that would make fifteen thousand. Two thousand more would lay down decent drains."

Nicodemus thumped the floor more vigorously:

"I says in my common way: 'Drains be damned!' "

John continued, warming to his work:

Digitized by Google

"Eight thousand more would be little enough to spend on the farms. That foots up twenty-five thousand pound."

"Ah-h-h!" The Ancient shook a trembling forefinger at him. "'Tis easy to make free wi' other folk's cash. Johnny'd have my lady so pore as we."

Agatha turned upon him.

"That's nonsense, granfer. Her income is six thousand a year. She could borrow twenty-five thousand by giving up one thousand a year. Instead of putting this big property in order, she bribes you all with doles. And she saves herself five hundred a year. Have you got it?"

Nicodemus retorted smartly:

"I holds wi' King Solomon, a wiser man even than I be, there bain't no fool so irksome as a female fool."

"Meaning, you rude old man?"

"That you be a lovesick maid, Aggie, and so soft as Nicky there."

John, still at the window, electrified the company by his next remark:

"My lady is here."

As he spoke, Lady Selina's stately figure was seen passing the casement. Timothy hurried from the kitchen; a firm tap was heard upon the door.

"Come in," said Agatha.

IV

Lady Selina, more imposing even than usual in her deep mourning, entered the kitchen. Nicodemus removed his hat deferentially. John stood stiffly at attention; Agatha remained near the table.

"Good morning to you."

Her eyes rested sympathetically upon John's empty sleeve. She held out her hand very graciously:

Digitized by Google

"My daughter told me that you and Agatha were engaged. You have my sincere good wishes."

John took the outstretched hand, and grasped it so awkwardly that Lady Selina slightly winced.

"Thank you, my lady."

Lady Selina turned to Agatha.

"I only heard this morning that your poor aunt was ill. I should like to see your uncle."

Agatha, taken aback, hesitated. Nicodemus said promptly: "I'll ask 'un to step down, my lady."

As he went out, Nick emerged from the ingle-nook, carrying a fool's cap, cleverly fashioned out of the newspaper he had purloined. Quite ignoring the great lady, intent only upon himself, he said pipingly:

"Here be your fool's cap, Aggie."

"What does he mean?" asked Lady Selina. She was conscious of the hostile atmosphere, mildly resentful that Agatha had not asked her to sit down, but willing to make due allowance for this breach of manners, because serious illness had obviously upset a tiny household.

"He means nothing," replied Agatha hastily.

"Granfer Burble told me to make 'un."

"Yes, yes. You can run away, Nick. You aren't afraid of me, are you?"

"I bain't afreard o' nothing, excep', maybe, our old broody hen."

He retired to his ingle-nook, as Nicodemus stumped back, his face redder than usual, his large mouth agape with consternation.

"Well, Nicodemus? . . ."

"Timothy won't come, my lady."

"Won't?" she repeated sharply. "Surely he sent some message?"

Nicodemus gasped out:

Digitized by Google

"I be too flustrated to gi' his message."

"Rubbish, my good man! Give me his message at once."

"Not me, my lady. I dassent repeat to your ladyship his sinful words."

"You will please obey me, Nicodemus, and kindly deliver the message exactly, *exactly* as it was given to you."

The Ancient almost whimpered:

"If so be as I do, you'll stop my—my——" the right word planted securely in his memory by Agatha slipped out unexpectedly—"doles."

"Doles! doles! What an extraordinary word for you to use to me!"

"'Twas Aggie's word, not mine, my lady. I means the milk and good wine you sends me."

"Oh!" Lady Selina glanced at Agatha, who by this time was expressionless. To Nicodemus she said tartly:

"I may stop your doles, if you disobey me."

"Timothy Farleigh be daffy, my lady."

"I insist upon being told what Timothy said, and at once."

Nicodemus, helplessly cornered, exploded with brutal violence.

"He said you might go to hell, my lady."

"Bless my soul!"

Lady Selina, however, was the first to recover her self-possession. She spoke very kindly to the unhappy old man.

"Thank you, Nicodemus. I beg your pardon. Had I guessed that such a message could be sent to me, I should not have asked you to deliver it. The man, of course, is mad."

"With grief," added Agatha defiantly.

Lady Selina ignored her, looking at Nicodemus.

"When he recovers his senses he will apologise."

Digitized by Google

"Not if I knows 'un," quavered the old man. "I allers says that rich folk should be treated wi' respect."

At this moment Agatha scrapped self-control. Her nerves, of course, were on edge. Possibly, too, Arthur Wilverley had overworked a too willing typist. And the spirit of revolt, as we know, was beginning at that time to stir the hearts of women. Agatha ought to have remembered what she owed to Lady Selina, who, in a material sense, had helped her to find herself. But, even here, the sense of obligation may have rankled. At any rate, the really irritating cause was the conviction that her holiday had been wrecked by Lady Selina's neglect of great issues entrusted to her. She addressed Nicodemus angrily:

"Yes; treated with respect—if they deserve it."

John attempted a warning cough.

"What do you mean, Agatha?"

Lady Selina spoke very softly, but she assumed quite unconsciously the look and pose of a mistress addressing a servant. To the emancipated Agatha this was unendurable.

"I mean," she retorted bitterly, "that my dear uncle is not mad. Words have burst from him because for all these dreary years he has been dumb—dumb."

Lady Selina eyed her derisively, thinking of past benefits conferred upon the undeserving.

"I am waiting for further enlightenment, you thankless young woman."

But Agatha, having shot her bolt, burst into tears. John came forward. What else could he do? A hunted glance from his future wife had set him afire. He pointed to the Bible.

"Enlightenment is in that," he said coldly.

"The Bible!" She stared at the big book and then at John. Was he deliberately trying to be insolent? "Do you read it?" she asked, with a lift of her eyebrows.

Digitized by Google

John opened the Bible and found the fly-leaf. His voice was trembling as he replied:

"Here, on this page, are the death-dates of Farleigh's two children, who died of diphtheria. Ever since, he has thought of things. You never guessed why he was so silent. How should you know what goes on in people's hearts? If Farleigh is mad, who made him so? Just now I emptied the ink-pot out of that window to prevent him altering 'died' to——"

"Go on! To—what?"

"To—*murdered*."

"Murdered by whom?"

John closed the Bible and made no answer. He withdrew quietly to the window. Meanwhile, Agatha had controlled her emotions and was dabbing at her eyes with a pocket-handkerchief which Lady Selina perceived to be of cambric as fine as her own. She addressed Agatha:

"Obviously you two think that I murdered these little girls."

Agatha replied without acrimony:

"I know what causes diphtheria and typhoid."

"I wonder if others in this village share your views and judgments."

Nicodemus made bold to say:

"I bain't one o' they, my lady."

"No, no; I am quite sure of that, my old friend." As she spoke she heard the crunching of gravel outside. "Who is this?"

"Mr. Grimshaw," answered John.

"You can ask him what he thinks," murmured Agatha, sensible that she and her John had exhausted their munitions.

"I will ask him," said Lady Selina.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X

UNDER THE VILLAGE TREE

I

GRIMSHAW had quite lost his look of wear and tear when he re-entered Farleigh's cottage. Love, we may presume, is omnipotent even over the ravages of malaria. Vitality expressed itself in his eyes and in every movement of his athletic body. He had just visited Isaac Burble; and he knew—humanly speaking—that he had pulled through the plucky old man. He believed, also, that he could restore Mary to the arms of the pessimistic Timothy. In short, his fighting instincts were agreeably quickened. The man's mind had become triumphant. Perhaps his dominant thought was the conviction that if he could win for his own a girl as sweet as Cicely, he could win also her mother. Cicely had imposed this task upon him. To "make good" in her eyes became the object paramount.

At the first glance round the kitchen he suspected nothing amiss, simply because his vision was slightly blurred by Cupid. He beheld Lady Selina, possibly for the first time, as the mother of his beloved rather than the lady of an ill-administered manor. And in her eyes he seemed to perceive a sort of appeal, which, of course, was there, although Lady Selina would have repudiated the fact had she been aware of it. Cicely's word "forlorn" obtruded itself. She looked exactly what she felt at the moment—solitary and practically aloof, a fine survival of a doomed aristocracy.

Digitized by Google

She greeted him courteously. Nicodemus stumped out. Agatha and John remained. After speaking to them, Grimshaw was crossing the kitchen when Lady Selina lifted her hand and voice:

"One moment, Mr. Grimshaw."

"Certainly."

"A grave charge has been brought against me."

She spoke very suavely, but he noticed that her tone was pitched higher than usual.

"A charge, Lady Selina?"

"In connection with the sickness in this house to-day, and the diphtheria long ago that took from Timothy Farleigh his two little girls."

The young man instantly realised what had taken place. A swift glance at Agatha confirmed his worst fears. The girl's lips were quivering; her bosom heaved. John, disciplined on the field of battle, stood doggedly at attention.

"These young people," continued Lady Selina, "accuse me of no less a crime than murder."

"Uncle Timothy used the word," said Agatha defiantly.

"And his niece, whom I have befriended in many ways, dares to lay the death of the two Farleigh children at my door."

Between two fires, and enfiladed by his own thoughts, stood the uneasy Grimshaw. Cicely's kisses were still warm on his lips. To do him justice, he was uneasy because all consideration, naturally enough, became centred upon Cicely. Swiftly, he perceived one way out of the wilderness. Taken aback, too honest to temporise deliberately, he said impetuously:

"A charge of murder is preposterous." He turned, almost angrily, upon Agatha, "Why do you talk nonsense? There can be no murder without motive."

Lady Selina smiled faintly.

Digitized by Google

"Thank you, Mr. Grimshaw. That ought to be obvious to any intelligence."

Agatha's face indicated confoundment. Stung more by Grimshaw's manner than his words, she said acrimoniously:

"So you side with Authority, Mr. Grimshaw?"

Once again, Grimshaw's part in the proceedings was forced. A different appeal from weakness to strength might have been met in a very different fashion. Irritated by the consciousness of being in a false position, irritated even more by Agatha's undisguised sneer, he said emphatically:

"I detest violence, Miss Farleigh. Violence, let me tell you, always defeats its ends."

He turned to Lady Selina who was visibly impressed.

"You are too generous, Lady Selina, not to make allowance for Timothy Farleigh, a man beside himself with misery and anxiety."

More and more pleased with Grimshaw, Lady Selina replied graciously:

"I hope so."

"If you will allow me," Grimshaw went on, "I will go to my patient."

He bowed and left the kitchen.

Lady Selina swept to the door. John opened it for her. Without a word, she passed into the hot sunshine.

John came back to Agatha, dropping this ointment upon her lacerated tissues:

"Grimshaw's a damned timeserver, Aggie, like the rest of 'em."

"I couldn't have believed it," she faltered. "I—I thought he was different."

Suddenly, from the ingle-nook came a burst of vivid flame. Nick had set his fool's-cap afire. His shrill, uncanny laugh rang through the kitchen.

Digitized by Google

"Damn the boy," exclaimed the startled John. Nick confronted him with his imbecile grin.

"I be saft along o' my lady," he piped. "Father says so; yas, I be saft along o' she."

II

Twenty-four hours elapsed.

During this time Upworthy celebrated the return of a hero, for as such the fathers of the hamlet regarded John Exton. Much ale, some of it pre-war strength, was drunk in his honour. At the Chandos Arms, upon the afternoon following, the gaffers toasted him again and again. He had to tell the tale of his adventures and misadventures in Flanders and France. Everybody knew that he was engaged to Agatha.

It was well after five when John escaped from his entertainers and returned to Timothy's cottage. Crossing the green he noticed that the sky was thunderously overcast. Agatha hurried out of the cottage as he approached it. All trace of anger and disappointment had vanished. She greeted her lover delightfully.

"I heard the cheers, Johnnie. I'm ever so proud of you."

He nodded modestly.

"I asked 'em not to follow me because of your aunt. How is she?"

"A bit better, we fancy. Mr. Grimshaw is with her. He sent me out for a whiff of air. Perhaps he saw you crossing the green."

John pointed to the tree and its comfortable encircling bench. He sat down, fanning his heated brow with his cap.

Digitized by Google

"Sultry, ain't it? I say, Aggie, guess what bucks me most?"

"All the ale you've drunk."

"They didn't propose my health straight. They gave the toast: "Ephraim Exton's son.' They haven't forgotten the old man." Laying down his cap he fished out his pipe, regarding it rather helplessly.

"Let me fill your pipe, dear," said Agatha.

John laughed.

"Can you do it, old girl?"

"Can I do it?"

She went to work with a skill that argued some practice, but John was not of a jealous disposition. He watched her deft fingers with admiration, remarking pleasantly:

"Little chunk of all-right, you are."

"Don't use up all your sugar, sergeant. There!"

She put the pipe between his smiling lips.

"Any matches, Johnnie?"

John took a silver match-box from his pocket.

"Catch!"

Agatha caught it, and examined it with interest. It was a queer old box, much engraved, obviously not of English make or design.

"What a handsome box!"

"Loot, Aggie. It belonged to a Boche. He'd no further use for it."

She struck a match and lit his pipe, which John smoked as if he enjoyed it. Agatha stepped back and regarded him attentively. He was just right, in her opinion: a man who had done "his bit," the man of her delicate choice, likely to make a sober, hard-working husband, clever enough and not too clever, one to be gently pushed by capable hands on to fortune. Smiling complacently, she seated herself beside

Digitized by Google

him. John slipped his one available arm round her shapely waist. She held the match-box in her hand.

"Put your dear head on my shoulder," he commanded.

"On the village green?"

"On my shoulder, I said."

"I'll risk it."

She had glanced round, not seeing Nick, who had wandered out of his father's garden, and was now behind the tree grinning broadly. John kissed the lips so near to his.

"Short o' these rations, I am," he declared with fervour. "Snug, I call it."

Agatha, half-closing her eyes, murmured:

"I feel as if I was floating in heaven."

"Blighty!" ejaculated the lover.

At this happy moment, Nick, crawling close up to Agatha, gripped her leg above the ankle, growling like a dog. Agatha screamed and jumped up.

"You blithering idiot!" said John. "Hop it—hop it!"

"Yes, I be village idiot, I be."

"Not half the fool you look. Shift, I tell you."

"I'll make Aggie another fool's-cap, I will. I can make anythin' wi' paper."

He laughed shrilly and hopped off, as enjoined. John stared at his retreating figure, observing sapiently:

"He can make anything with paper. Fools make paper laws. Papers rule us in England."

Agatha sat down again, nodding her intelligent head.

"That's right. Papers do rule us. Why don't you write to them, Johnnie?"

John betrayed slight astonishment.

"What about, dear?"

Agatha answered tartly:

"Conditions here."

Digitized by Google

"Napoo," replied John lazily.

Agatha was revolving this refusal in her mind when Grimshaw came out of the cottage carrying his bag. He was smiling, thinking of Cicely and her tryst with him.

Agatha nudged the somnolent John.

"Mr. Grimshaw is coming."

John rose, and saluted stiffly as Grimshaw approached.

"Good day, sergeant. Going down the old, old trail, eh?"

John answered perfunctorily: "Yes, sir."

Grimshaw looked at Agatha, who had not risen. This abstention was part of her new creed.

"I've no new instructions for you, Miss Farleigh. Keep your aunt quiet."

Agatha replied as formally as John:

"Yes, sir. Is it typhoid, Mr. Grimshaw?"

"I did a Widal last night." He added quickly, "that is a blood test. I am inclined to think your aunt has paratyphoid."

John, impressed by the long word, said dismally:

"Then she's a goner."

"Oh, no. Paratyphoid is much less dangerous than typhoid. With ordinary care Mrs. Farleigh will recover. And, thank the Lord, I can trust you, Miss Farleigh, to see that she has more than ordinary care. Perhaps you will go to her now."

Poor Agatha, thus torn from her lover, rose obediently, but with much ruffled plumage. Without a word she stalked into the cottage. Grimshaw said pleasantly:

"I'm sorry, but her aunt is alone."

John answered bluntly but respectfully:

"Agatha's upset after yesterday, and so am I."

"After yesterday?" Grimshaw frowned, a frown that deepened as John continued emphatically:

Digitized by Google

"We expected you to stand by us, Mr. Grimshaw, and you didn't. You know what lies behind things here; you must know that her ladyship hasn't done her duty. And when I think of the trenches and the men in 'em it maddens me"—his voice trembled with excitement—"to see great ladies, like Lady Selina Chandos, downing those whom we are fighting, aye, and dying for. It makes me want to down her. And I will, by God!"

Grimshaw said quietly, but not without sympathy:

"You're a good fellow, John Exton, but, believe me, you only see one side of this."

"I see pretty plain that you're not on that side, sir."

"I'm not on the side of ranting. Ranting has wrecked many causes. It antagonises sane men and women. To charge Lady Selina with murder is—as I said yesterday—preposterous and ridiculous. I want to down not an individual but a system."

"Her ladyship is part of the system, and the biggest part in Upworthy. That's enough for me."

He strode off without saluting. Grimshaw glanced at his watch. Cicely was not due yet. He sat down in John's place, thinking hard, dismally conscious that he must appear a sorry figure in the eyes of Sergeant Exton, conscious also that he had won the very thing he wanted, Lady Selina's approval, under false pretences. It was horrible to think that Exton regarded him as a hypocrite with malevolent eyes. And what did the man mean by his threats of "downing" Lady Selina? Then he laughed a little, because it was almost impossible to think of Lady Selina "downed." Such imperturbable personalities were not downed by others. If the whole village rose in arms against her, if she were stoned on the village green, she would stand superbly erect till the end.

A light laugh roused these reflections. Cicely stood in

Digitized by Google

front of him, smiling gaily. The pressure of her little hand was reassuring.

"Did you get mother's invitation to dine with us to-night?"

"The august Stimson delivered it in person."

"Who was wise?"

He laughed with her, although he replied sincerely:

"That question, dearest, can't be answered yet."

Ignoring this, Cicely sat down, saying:

"I am ever so happy. You don't know what an impression you made upon mother yesterday. Now—keep it up."

"That's all right; but can I?"

"Of course you can, if you try hard enough." Captivated by her manner, sitting close to her, he heard her soft whisper:

"Did you dream of me last night?"

"I didn't sleep much last night."

"Didn't you? Well, I lay awake till after one thinking of you."

"You blessed little dear!"

She raised her eyes to his as if inviting him to gaze into their clear depths and to behold there his own image innocently enshrined. To dissemble with so artless a creature was quite impossible.

"Something is troubling you, Harry. Tell me!"

"Call it my conscience. To accept so much"—he spoke passionately—"and to be able to give so little; to know, as I do, that my love may bring distress and unhappiness upon you! Ah, that tears me! I must speak plainly now, or never. What is Upworthy to you? Have you ever tried to measure your feeling for this village and all that goes with it? Are you able to set a valuation, so to speak, upon it?"

Digitized by Google

"My dear old home. . . . I don't quite see what you are driving at. What do you mean by a valuation?"

"I mean this. I lay awake last night realising the inevitable fact that if you marry me against your mother's wishes you risk—disinheritance."

"Disinheritance! Why, Harry, mother loves me. She would never do that. Never, never, never. You don't know her——"

"I don't. Do you? Does she know herself? Do any of us know ourselves? Are we able to say confidently what we would do, or not do, till some supreme test comes along?"

She considered his words carefully; her eyes clouded with perplexity, her lips quivered.

"You are making me miserable."

"At what a cost to my own feelings! But we must face things together, as they are, not as we would like them to be. First and last, it comes to this: In your own irresistible way you have invited me to join what I call the great conspiracy of silence in Upworthy. Better men than I are amongst the conspirators. Dear old Pawley, for example. It is natural for him, ten thousand times more so for you, to 'spare' your mother, to keep her in cotton wool, to please, in a word, a personality so gracious, so kindly at heart, so sincerely anxious to do the right thing in, alas! the wrong way. But, as an honest man, Cicely, I side with her tenants as against her."

"Heavens! Do you mean that you took mother's part yesterday against your conscience, and that I tempted you to do so?"

"No, no; the murder charge was absurd. But I conveyed the impression to others that my sympathies lay with your mother in her management of this estate, and they don't."

"If you would listen to me. . . ."

"God knows I want to listen to you, you witch."

Digitized by Google

Cicely picked her way. To the man who was watching her it became plain that she knew her ground. Her confidence would have been amusing if lesser issues had been at stake.

"You can't change things or people quickly, can you?"

"Earthquakes do."

"Perhaps. Earthquakes don't happen in English villages. If mother learnt to trust you instead of Gridley all that you wish might be brought about without—without friction. And if not altogether in her lifetime—afterwards. I will work hand-in-hand with you, Harry. I shall love it. Between us we will change Upworthy into a model village. I ask for nothing better. I know that mother wants me to-day as she never wanted me before. To hurt her now, to let others hurt her . . . ah! . . . that isn't in me. Win mother as you have won me and we shall find our future happiness without imperilling hers."

Her exact choice of words indicated her intelligence and the amount of thought that she must have given to so difficult a subject. Fiercest temptation assailed Grimshaw. And he had yielded, under far less pressure, to importunity in Essex and Poplar. After a tormenting pause he said hoarsely:

"It means whitewash, Cicely. I can find no other word."

She touched his arm gently.

"I wish I were strong like you."

"But I'm not strong," he protested vehemently. "No one is. The strong man we read about is a writer's lie. There isn't a so-called strong man in history without a weak spot somewhere. Don't make me weaker than I am. Perhaps—perhaps I ought to go away for a year and leave you free."

The test propounded so tentatively failed utterly. In her turn she became vehement.

Digitized by Google

"No, no. If you leave me, Harry, it will be because your love is less than mine."

As they gazed searchingly at each other a senile whistling was borne down the breeze. Cicely said desperately:

"Somebody is coming. Harry—suspense will kill me. Women understand women. Be patient, and mother will accept you as a son. I am sure of it. And I shall love the strength in you more if you show a little weakness now for my sake. Direct methods, which men use, are so brutal. I am pleading for our happiness. Promise me—quick!"

In her agitation she clung to him, pressing her soft body against his. He answered dully:

"All right, Cicely."

The Ancient approached, redder than usual in the face. His gait was not perfectly steady. Cicely said hurriedly:

"It's Nicodemus. He may pass on. Good day, granfer."

Nicodemus halted, surveying the pair whimsically.

"Good day, miss. Good day, doctor. A rare starm be comin' up. I feel 'un in my old boans."

"You mustn't get wet, Master Burble," said the artful Cicely.

"Ah-h-h! I bain't in no sart o' hurry to invite meself, as the sayin' is, to my own funeral. I be come from drinkin' Johnny Exton's health—a very notable set-to."

Cicely still hoping that the garrulous old man would move on, said briskly:

"Yes; we heard some cheering up at the Hall."

"Did 'ee now? Johnny be a valiant soul, but a sad Raddicle. I hope, miss, that her ladyship won't mix me up wi' him and Aggie Farleigh. I don't hold wi' such flustratious talk."

"My mother knows that."

Nicodemus uplifted his voice, thinking, possibly, that his

Digitized by Google

wise words might penetrate the open windows in the Farleigh cottage:

"Rich folks, I allers say, should be treated wi' respect—because why? They can make we pore 'uns so danged uncomfortsome. Beggin' your pardon, miss, but I'll sit me down under old tree. It ha' seen a sight o' things, to be sure."

Grimshaw and Cicely exchanged rueful glances, sensible that the Ancient had diddled them squarely. He cackled on:

"Lumbager has me this instant minute. 'Twas the third tankard as done it."

Grimshaw stood up, looking at his watch and addressing Cicely:

"I must see a patient on the Wilverley road."

Cicely nodded, as he continued formally for the benefit of Nicodemus: "Better get home, Miss Chandos, before the storm breaks. Till—to-night."

"Eight punctually, Mr. Grimshaw."

He picked up his bag and strode off. Nicodemus smacked his lips.

"A very forcible man, doctor."

"Yes, he is—and so are you, granfer."

"A-h-h! Father o' five I was at his age. How be Mary Farleigh, miss?"

"A shade better." She looked up at the darkening skies. "I shall just have time to get home. Good night, Master Burble."

"Good night, miss."

III

After Cicely had left him, the Ancient dozed pleasantly, being full of ale paid for by others. Martha Giles awoke him by shaking his shoulder.

Digitized by Google

"Be you quite sober, Master Burble?" she asked in a neighbourly spirit, and not unmindful of the change in the weather.

Nicodemus wagged his head, remarking chirrupingly:

"I've had a rare skin-full, Martha, and my old legs tell me so, not my head, old girl. Call it a touch o' lumbager, as I did to Miss Cicely. So Mary be better, hey?"

"Yas, Mary be better and Timothy worse, pore dear soul!"

"What? Down wi' the fever, too?"

"Fev'rish in his mind, look you. And that set agen my lady 'tis a mortal sin. Yas, Mary be mendin'. A be-utiful corpse she'd ha' made. 'Twould ha' been a sad pleasure to lay her out. Aggie got miffed when I passed the remark to her las' night."

Nicodemus heaved a sigh.

"Young folks be upsettin', Martha. We be livin' in fearful and wondersome times."

Martha did not answer him, her attention being engrossed by a sudden sight of Nick capering wildly across the green.

"Come you here," she shouted.

Nick danced up, grinning.

"Wheer ha' you been, Nick? Up to some mischief, I'll be bound."

"He can bide along wi' me," said Nicodemus comfortably.

"I likes you," said Nick.

"Do 'ee now? For why?"

"Because you be so nice an' hairy, like old baboon I sees at Wilverley Fair."

Nicodemus accepted this as a compliment. A bell began to boom loudly. Both Martha and the Ancient were startled.

"Dang me, if that bain't big bell up at Hall!"

Digitized by Google

He half-staggered to his feet, and fell back.

"I be fair ashamed o' my legs," he observed solemnly. Then, as the bell boomed out even more violently, he cocked his head at Martha.

"Something be up, Marthy. You climb tree, Nicky, and tell us what you sees."

"The lad might break his neck," suggested Martha.

"You climb tree," commanded Nicodemus, "or I'll warm your starn-sheets for 'ee."

"I likes to climb trees, I do."

"Then up you goes."

Nicky obeyed with alacrity. As he reached the first branch, Agatha appeared at the cottage window which fronted the green.

"What has happened?" she asked. The bell went on ringing. Then a sharp whistle was heard.

"Constable's whistle," remarked the Ancient. "I knows 'un."

Excitement gripped them, as a man tore past on a bicycle, heading for Wilverley. As he passed the tree, he yelled out: "Fire! Fire!"

"That was Wilson. My lady's shover," faltered Martha. "Oh, dear! oh, dear! Where be fire?"

"'Tis a rick, maybe," hazarded Nicodemus.

By this time, Nick was high up the tree. He shouted down:

"I sees a gert smoke, I do."

"Wheer? Wheer?" shouted Nicodemus.

Martha Giles expressed a positive opinion that Wilson was riding fast for the Wilverley fire-engine.

"Why didn't 'un take my lady's car?"

Nick shouted again, very shrilly:

"I sees yeller flames, I do."

Agatha rushed out of the cottage.

Digitized by Google

"It's the Hall," she said, tremblingly. "Maybe 'tis only a chimney."

"Ah-h-h. Best thing for that is a wet turf a-top o' chimney pot, and a wet blanket stuffed up the flue. I knows."

Martha covered her face with her apron. But Nicodemus tried to hearten her up with his coagulated wisdom.

"Things might be worse, Marthy. Our cottages might be afire—see."

Nevertheless, one and all stared at each other, helpless and almost tongue-tied under the stress of emergency.

"I wish I knew where my John was," said Agatha.

Nick yelled out:

" 'Tis the Hall, neighbours. The roof be blazin'."

Agatha, very pale, hurried back into the cottage. Martha observed, less tearfully:

"Lard, presarve us! That pore soul in bed needs rousin'. This'll do it. Here be Timothy Farleigh."

Timothy stood in his doorway. His deepset eyes smouldered sullenly. Not a word escaped from his tightly-compressed lips. Nicodemus piped shrilly at him:

"Timothy, man, old Hall be afire."

"Let 'un burn," replied Timothy, in diapason tones. "Let 'un burn, I says."

The Ancient glared at him.

"Shame on 'ee—shame! Think o' the good liquor down cellar."

"Let 'un burn, I says."

Nicodemus, full of righteous indignation, replied sharply:

"I don't want to listen to what you says. You listen to what I says. I be old in wisdom, and you be old in your blarsted ignerunce. We pore folks'll suffer for this."

A red glow suffused itself. Almost immediately a peal of distant thunder was heard. Timothy, erect and menacing, exclaimed solemnly:

Digitized by Google

"This be the Day o' Judgment."

Nicodemus shook his fist at him.

"If that be so, you stand wi' the goats."

But really he was impressed by Timothy's deportment. The man seemed to have expanded. He had the air of an inspired prophet as he lifted his deep voice:

"May God A'mighty deal this day wi' Lady Selina Chandos as she has dealt wi' me and mine!"

IV

George Ball, the village constable, joined the group under the tree, and dismounted from his bicycle. He was a heavy, good-natured man, ordinarily lethargic. He spoke with authority:

"Is Doctor Grimshaw here?"

"No, he bain't, Garge. What be wantin' doctor for, hey?"

"I dun'no. Miss Cicely told me to fetch 'un quick. Old Hall be done for. That's sartain."

A quarter of an hour at least had elapsed before George appeared. During that time, men and boys had been seen hurrying up to the Hall. Nicodemus, unable to budge, had remained under the tree. No rain had fallen as yet, but the storm was coming nearer, and the intermittent lightning became more vivid with each succeeding flash. From the top of the tree Nick's eerie laughter floated earthwards.

"Anybody burned?" asked the Ancient.

George Ball couldn't be sure of this. He furnished a few details, avidly swallowed. The fire had started in the garage, and thence spread to the house; all the servants were safe, and busy rescuing pictures and furniture. He concluded on a high, nerve-shattering note:

"'Tis arson, I reckons."

Digitized by Google

"What be arson?" asked Martha Giles.

"Settin' other folks' houses afire," replied the constable. Noting a derisive smile on Timothy's face, he asked officially:

"Why ain't you up at Hall—helpin'?"

Timothy replied defiantly:

"Because I bain't."

George Ball went on:

"Arson it seems to be, accordin' to Wilson. He told me in servants' hall that he had left the garage not five minutes afore fire started. Positive, he was, that all was snug. In my quiet way I spoke o' cigarettes, but Fred Wilson don't smoke terbacker in no form. And he swears that no match was lighted by him this blessed afternoon. Bag o' mystery this be, because my lady had no enemies in these parts."

"Liar!" remarked Timothy.

The astonished constable glared at him.

"What you say?"

"I said, liar. I be her enemy."

George, utterly dazed, wiped his forehead, ejaculating:

"Queer talk, I must say."

To this Timothy replied savagely:

"You'll be wiser afore you're older."

Nicodemus interrupted sharply:

"Timothy Farleigh'll be dead afore he's wise at all. Now, Garge, I minds me that Doctor Grimshaw walked off Wilverley way. If that bit o' news be worth a tankard, don't 'ee forget it, my good man."

"You might ha' said as much five minutes ago."

He mounted his bicycle and sped off.

Nicodemus, active of mind and unduly elated because ale had impaired underpinning, instead of understanding, was now the centre of a small group of women, children

Digitized by Google

and gaffers. Everybody else, of course, was watching the fire in the Hall gardens, or helping to remove furniture. From the first none dared even to hope that so old a house, so heavily timbered, could escape being burnt to the ground.

Martha Giles said mournfully:

"Her ladyship, pore dear soul, 'll be lacking shelter."

By the luck of things, she addressed this innocent remark to Timothy, who remained at his wicket gate, sullenly rejoicing over this great calamity. He replied harshly:

"Shelter? Aye. Not under my roof."

Nicodemus, trembling with rage, exclaimed:

"'Twon't be your roof much longer, you damned fool. You be headin' straight for porehouse, you be. No part wine there, and the vittles so ontasty as never was."

Agatha, noting the angry faces glaring at her uncle, said entreatingly:

"Better go in, uncle."

"No," said Timothy, "not till the house of that woman be utterly destroyed."

V

Destroyed it was within an incredibly short space of time.

From the moment when the garage burst into flame Lady Selina behaved with fortitude, directing operations and exhibiting amazing pluck and resource. The most valuable furniture, the pictures, china and plate were carried to the farther end of the topiary garden. Despite the entreaties of Cicely, the lady of the manor was almost the last to leave the house. As she did so a tongue of flame licked her arm. Unmindful of this, she commanded a general retreat, a withdrawal to a slight eminence in the garden, whence the last act of the tragedy was witnessed. Here, to her satisfaction, she learned that nobody except herself had been injured. Already Cicely had dispatched

Digitized by Google

George Ball in search of Grimshaw. Lady Selina, however, made light of her scorching, concerned only with the housing of her establishment. It was settled that Cicely and she would go to the Vicarage for the night. The worthy Goodrich hovered about her, scant of breath but full of sympathy and warm with indignation because the dreadful word "arson" lay pat on every lip except his own.

Towards the end, after the roof had fallen in, the rain poured down. Lady Selina gazed sadly at the ruins of her home, saying nothing. Cicely clutched her.

"Come, mother, you will be wet through."

Lady Selina yielded at length to importunity. She passed, erect, through her people, and took the path to the village, pausing to speak to the landlord of the Chandos Arms, to whom the board and lodging of her servants had been entrusted.

"I will see to it myself that all is in order."

"Very good, my lady."

Then, resolutely, she turned her back upon all that was left of the home to which she had come as a bride. In silence, leaning upon her daughter's arm, she walked wearily, spent by her physical exertions. Goodrich followed, and others. Burdens greater than those of fatigue weighed heavily upon her. By the time she had reached the tree upon the green, the first tropical downpour was over.

"I must rest a moment," she said faintly.

"Are you in pain, mother?"

"Of course I am, but that is of no consequence."

"When will Mr. Grimshaw be here?"

Lady Selina sat down, gasping a little. Nicodemus tried to stand up.

"Sit you down, old friend," commanded Lady Selina.

"A very sad mishap, my lady."

"Very."

Digitized by Google

Then, for the first time, she heard the word that was distressing the parson. The Ancient, feeling as if he were enthroned beside the queen regnant, and regarded as a trusty councillor, remarked solemnly:

"Garge Ball do say 'twas arson."

Instantly Lady Selina became alert. She sat up in every sense of the phrase, alert, interrogative, almost excited.

"Arson?" she repeated sharply. "Impossible!"

Nicodemus wagged his hoary head. This was his great moment. To rise to it adequately became a sort of obsession.

"I knows what I knows," he affirmed positively.

"Stuff and nonsense!" exclaimed the parson.

Lady Selina spoke gently to the old man

"Tell me what you know, Nicodemus."

Thus encouraged, the Ancient expanded visibly, raising his voice so that all and sundry might hear him.

"'Tis ondeniably true that your ladyship has enemies in this yere parish."

Probably he expected protest. Lady Selina said quietly:

"So I discovered yesterday."

"I bain't one to carry tales, my lady."

It says much for Lady Selina Chandos that this affirmation provoked her humour. In the familiar tone that so endeared her to her dependents, she bantered the old gaffer:

"That won't do, Nicodemus. We have gossiped together a score of times. Any service you can render me will not be forgotten, I can assure you."

"Ah-h-h! I did hear wicked talk about burning down this village."

"Where?"

Goodrich, as a Justice of the Peace, was constrained to interrupt:

"Dear lady," he said warningly, "may I suggest that any

Digitized by Google

inquiry ought to take place at another time, and in a more private place?"

Slightly irritated, conscious, perhaps, that Nicodemus might not speak at another time and in another place with entire frankness, Lady Selina said tartly:

"Please allow me to be the judge of that." In a more conciliatory tone she addressed Nicodemus: "Where did you hear this talk?"

"In cottage yonder." He pointed to Farleigh's house.

"From whom?"

"From Aggie Farleigh and John Exton."

"Quite so."

Cicely interrupted eagerly:

"Mother, you don't—you can't think either of them capable of——"

Lady Selina cut her short.

"My dear, long ago I thought of them as firebrands, and firebrands they are."

Goodrich, much perturbed, but ever the peacemaker, suggested blandly:

"If you are rested sufficiently, Lady Selina, shall we go on to my house? Another heavy shower impends."

"Rested! . . . Do you think that rest is possible till I have got to the bottom of this?" She raised her voice again, glancing round at the circle of familiar faces, some of them not looking too friendly, inasmuch as Agatha and John were favourites in the village. Even to the rustic mind, prone to leap hastily to wrong conclusions, this indictment of two persons on so grave a charge, an indictment unsupported by evidence, seemed unjust and intolerable. A faint murmur of protest was heard.

"Does anybody present," continued Lady Selina, "know anything that would throw light on this dreadful charge of arson? If so, I ask him or her to speak."

Digitized by Google

Stimson stepped forward. He was hardly recognisable. The staid, respectable butler had covered himself with glory and grime in a beloved mistress's service.

She smiled graciously upon him.

"Yes, my lady. I saved all the plate, every bit of it, my lady."

"Oh, Stimson! We could have spared that ugly Early-Victorian tea-service. Well, well, you faithful soul, do you know anything?"

"There is this clue, my lady. We found it on the grass near the garage."

He held out a silver match-box.

"A match-box?"

"Yes, my lady."

She examined it carefully. The parson, pince-nez on nose, took it gently from her hand. Then, with the air of Sherlock Holmes, he said portentously:

"It bears a German inscription. I draw the obvious inference—it was made in Germany."

The crowd sighed with relief as the parson continued in the tones ordinarily sacrosanct to the lectern and pulpit:

"I infer more. One of our enemies, some alien, possibly, who has escaped internment, must have committed this terrible crime."

The crowd hummed approval. Lady Selina, more alert than ever, observed derisively:

"Your inference will hold water, Mr. Goodrich, if any alien has been seen about my premises."

Goodrich replied hastily:

"'M'yes—a question pat to the point."

"Many persons," continued Lady Selina, "carry objects like match-boxes, made in Germany."

At this Agatha came forward. Timothy had gone back into his cottage as soon as he saw Lady Selina approach-

Digitized by Google

ing. Agatha had remained near the cottage gate, looking anxiously for her lover.

"May I look at the match-box?" she asked quietly.

"Certainly."

It was handed to her. The crowd edged in closer. Agatha said positively:

"This match-box belongs to John Exton. I struck a match on it not an hour ago, here, on this very spot. I—I had it in my hand. I must have dropped it or left it on this bench. I can't remember returning it to—to its owner."

A dramatic silence followed, broken by Goodrich, no longer the parson but the magistrate.

"You testify to that, Agatha Farleigh?"

"Testify?" she repeated blankly.

"It is my duty to warn you that anything said by you now may be used against you later."

"What does this all mean?" groaned Cicely.

Her mother answered grimly: "It means something very terrible, child."

As she spoke, Grimshaw, mounted upon the constable's bicycle, was seen approaching.

"Mr. Grimshaw at last!" exclaimed Cicely. As he dismounted she said to him nervously: "Mother has been burnt."

"Scorched, my dear; scorched."

"It's a very nasty burn," said Cicely.

Grimshaw insisted upon instant examination. He unstrapped his bag, opened it, and took out a pair of scissors. Deftly he slit up the sleeve, saying:

"Ball could not tell me what was saved."

"The servants saved themselves," said Lady Selina. "We saved the more valuable miniatures and my Chelsea. There is a pantechnicon van-load of furniture on the lawns."

Grimshaw nodded, intent on his work. He pulled a

Digitized by Google

broad bandage from his bag and made an impromptu sling, adding professionally:

"This must be dressed properly elsewhere. Where are you going, Lady Selina?"

"To my house," said Goodrich.

"In five minutes," murmured Lady Selina. Obviously she was in pain, but her eyes rested tranquilly upon Grimshaw. She appreciated the delicacy of his touch, and said so. Then she addressed Agatha coldly:

"The match-box, please."

Agatha returned it, bursting out vehemently:

"I know what you think, my lady, but it's simply impossible. I wish Sergeant Exton were here to defend himself. As for me," she drew herself up with dignity, "I have been in attendance upon my aunt, as Martha Giles can *testify*."

She glanced at the parson, using the word scornfully.

"Johnnie Exton be here," exclaimed one of the crowd.

The villagers made way for John, who approached Agatha. The young man was dishevelled and his khaki was scorched and stained by smoke. Out of a grimy face his eyes sparkled brilliantly.

"Where have you been, John?" asked Agatha.

"Helping up at the Hall."

"Helping?" repeated Lady Selina.

"I did what a one-armed man could, my lady."

"Of course you did," said Agatha. "No one who knows you," she added defiantly, "would question that."

Lady Selina, bent upon conducting the inquiry in her own way, said sharply:

"Where were you, sergeant, when the fire broke out?"

"I was in the park."

"In my park—but why?"

"There is a right of way through the park, my lady."

Digitized by Google

"True. Now, Nicodemus, speak up, speak the whole truth? Did you or did you not hear Sergeant Exton and Agatha say that my village ought to be burnt?"

The Ancient, never forgetting doles, piped up valiantly: "I heard 'un, my lady; I heard more, too."

"I did say that a score of cottages ought to be burnt, including Timothy Farleigh's. And what of it? It's true. Let the whole truth come out. Nicodemus Burble heard more. What? I'll tell you. He heard Timothy Farleigh, a man crazy with misery, say that the Hall ought to be burnt first."

The crowd, inarticulate with astonishment, buzzed like a swarm of bees. Grimshaw, thinking first of his patient, anxious to keep her quiet, suggested an immediate withdrawal to the Vicarage.

"Not yet," replied Lady Selina firmly. Perhaps she was conscious of latent sympathy from her people. In a very few she may have divined hostility. She addressed the parson.

"You know, Mr. Goodrich, what was said by Sergeant Exton when I had to give his father notice to leave his farm?"

"I grieve to say I do," answered Goodrich.

"Agatha Farleigh, here, whom Sergeant Exton is going to marry, lays the death of the two Farleigh children at my door. And now my house is burnt."

She betrayed no excitement, no animosity. Slowly she held up the match-box.

"Is this yours?"

John stared at it.

Lady Selina continued impassively:

"It was picked up near the garage. An hour ago it was in your possession."

Digitized by Google

"It was," John admitted. "But I haven't been near the garage."

Goodrich said impatiently:

"All this is irregular. At the same time, matters having gone so far, I will take it upon myself to ask you a question, sergeant: Will you tell us exactly where you happened to be when the fire broke out?"

"I happened to be near the house."

"Alone?"

"Alone."

The villagers were tremendously impressed. Of all now present, and many others had sauntered up, possibly Exton and Lady Selina alone remained self-possessed. Agatha said emotionally:

"Miss Cicely—you—you don't accuse my John? You—can't!"

A sob broke from her. As Cicely, on the edge of tears, did not answer quickly, Agatha turned impetuously to Grimshaw.

"I appeal to you, Mr. Grimshaw."

Lady Selina nodded majestically:

"I shall be glad to hear what you think, Mr. Grimshaw."

"I think, Lady Selina, that John Exton is innocent of this charge."

"Thank you, sir," said John.

"Is that thought," said Goodrich, "grounded on some evidence not yet forthcoming?"

Grimshaw replied quietly: "You see, I know the man. Does not character weigh with you, Mr. Goodrich?"

"Of course."

Lady Selina, looking earnestly at Grimshaw, continued:

"But, unhappily, this young man's character as—as an agitator, as a stirrer-up of strife, is against him."

"To my knowledge," Grimshaw replied firmly, "he has

Digitized by Google

been a good son and a good soldier. Doesn't that appeal to you, Lady Selina?"

"It does. You say, Mr. Grimshaw, that you know Sergeant Exton. Has he, in talk with you, ever shown any personal animus against me?"

Grimshaw betrayed his uneasiness, conscious once again that his hand was being forced by Fate, that, against his own convictions and principles, he was constrained to take, seemingly, the side of Authority. He hesitated, and then answered quickly:

"Well, yes; he has, but——"

John Exton cut him short.

"I'm not ashamed of what I said. I told Doctor Grimshaw, my lady, that I wanted to see you—*downed.*"

"Ah."

The fact that she made no comment strengthened her case enormously in the eyes and ears of those who might still be counted loyal subjects. On the other hand, John's handsome admission, his frank countenance, his soldierly deportment made a profound impression. Cecily, torn in two, exclaimed vehemently:

"It's incredible! You, a brave man, a soldier of the King, actually wanted to down a woman!"

Lady Selina, with uplifted hand, imposed silence. Goodrich delivered his verdict:

"I am grieved—grieved. Where is the constable, George Ball?"

"Here, sir."

Goodrich addressed him magisterially:

"If a constable has reasonable ground for suspecting that a felony has been committed, he can arrest the person so suspected without a warrant."

Agatha interposed hotly:

"The grounds are unreasonable."

Digitized by Google

"Are they, Mr. Grimshaw?"

Lady Selina's smooth, soft voice silenced the murmuring crowd. Breathlessly Grimshaw's answer was awaited. He replied promptly:

"Not altogether."

"Thank you."

For the second time, using him as a sort of court of final appeal, she had triumphed, and triumph informed her tones. She continued, as quietly as before:

"I put it to you, as an impartial observer, as a comparative stranger to this village and its ways, is it unreasonable to give this man into custody pending a proper enquiry?"

"Perhaps not."

The crowd buzzed with excitement. It was impossible to interpret that buzzing. Grimshaw continued professionally:

"As your medical attendant, Lady Salina, I must insist upon dressing your arm at once. I will go to Dr. Pawley's dispensary to fetch what is necessary, and rejoin you at the Vicarage."

He bowed and went his way. Lady Selina stood up, surveying her people.

"Quite obviously, Mr. Grimshaw gave an honest opinion against a kindly wish to help an old acquaintance."

George Ball, knowing instinctively the temper of the villagers, and divining trouble, said tentatively:

"Be I to take John Exton into custody, my lady?"

"Yes."

George Ball, attempting to justify himself before his fellow-villagers, added deprecatingly:

"It do seem as if the Hall couldn't, so to speak, set fire to itself. All the same, my lady——"

"Well?"

Digitized by Google

"I be only parish constable, my lady, and if I exceeds my dooty I be liable to lose my job."

"I will assume all responsibility," the lady of the manor assured him. Thus fortified, Ball turned to John.

"I be bound to ax you to come along wi' me."

Sergeant Exton answered cheerfully:

"That's all right, George. You can't help yourself. Aggie, dear——"

She flung herself into his embrace, sobbing bitterly.

"You didn't do it, Johnnie! You didn't do it!"

"Bless your heart! I didn't."

"It's begun to rain again," said Cicely.

She took her mother's arm. Lady Selina nodded, too tired to speak. In silence, followed by the parson, mother and daughter passed through the gaping villagers.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XI

REVOLUTION

I

MOTHER and daughter were left alone in the Vicarage drawing-room, pending the arrival of Grimshaw, who was likely to come in at any moment. The parson bustled off to collogue with an ancient parlour-maid, who exacted tactful treatment. Long ago the parson's wife had passed to a much-needed rest, a fact, indeed, stated positively upon her tombstone.

Lady Selina sank pathetically into a comfortable arm-chair. Cicely regarded her anxiously, but admiringly. She bent down to kiss her cheek, murmuring:

"Dear mother, you are brave."

Lady Selina sighed, leaning her head upon her uninjured hand. It was difficult to interpret the expression upon her fine face. Behind the physical weariness, an odd look of bewilderment revealed itself. When she spoke, something else—was it acrimony or amazement?—challenged Cicely's attention.

"How smug this room is!"

Cicely glanced round. Her mother had hit the right word. Smug, indeed! But, familiar as she was from child-hood with every stick of furniture, Cicely had never till this moment realised the smugness. And that, of course, jumped to the eye when it was mentioned. Every room has its particular message. Cicely knew that nothing in

Digitized by Google

that prim apartment had been changed during five-and-twenty years. Anæmic water-colour drawings adorned the walls, which were demurely grey, a lasting tint. The curtains and the seats of sundry chairs were excellent samples of Mrs. Goodrich's tireness needlework. They seemed to say, modestly: "See what patient industry can achieve!" The steel fender and fire-irons were more vocal. "Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do." The well-worn carpet was immaculate; not a speck of dust could be detected upon the china ornaments or upon the rosewood furniture. A betting man would have laid heavy odds against finding cobwebs under the upright piano, starkly upright, naked and not ashamed. Cicely could remember the parson's wife playing hymns and sonatinas upon it. Surely it would explode with indignation if the syncopated rhythm of rag-time were blasphemously imposed upon the ivory keys——! It was terrible to reflect that such an instrument, sanctified, so to speak, to Divine Service, might be debased—after a defiling public sale—to a worst inn's best room, to be banged by trippers.

These thoughts flashed into Cicely's mind.

"It is smug," she assented. "It knows, probably, that it's just right. Yes, self-righteousness is the note."

She laughed a little, but Lady Selina remained unamused.

"Cicely, some of my people didn't help at the fire."

This was an arresting statement, impossible to assimilate at a gulp. Cicely replied hastily:

"I saw many helping."

"I saw some—laughing."

"I laughed myself a moment ago. It's just excitement. I felt hysterical."

Lady Selina appeared to be wandering down a maze of introspection, picking her way in and out of blind alleys. She asked a question.

Digitized by Google

"How long has this bitter feeling of the Farleighs against me been smouldering?"

"I—I suppose ever since his little girls died."

"You were aware of it?"

"Ye—es."

"Then, why didn't you warn me?"

"I—I don't know."

After a pause Lady Selina continued heavily:

"I am forced to the conclusion that things—important things—have been kept from me. Why? Why?"

Cicely blushed faintly, thinking of Grimshaw's phrase: "the conspiracy of silence."

"Perhaps, Mother, those who loved you wanted to spare you."

Lady Selina nodded.

"I understand. I have been regarded by those who loved me as a fool content in her paradise."

As she spoke Grimshaw was ushered in. He crossed to his patient, saying courteously:

"Forgive an unavoidable delay, Lady Selina. I had to dress your coachman's hand."

"My poor Hutchings——! Is he much hurt?"

"He thinks so. It's nothing. He hasn't your pluck."

As he spoke, he took from his bag a roll of absorbent cotton wool and a bottle of picric acid solution, which he placed upon a table where such articles were eyed askance by a Parian-marble lady under a glass dome. Deftly, he removed the sling.

"Tell me if I hurt you."

"I shall do nothing of the sort."

In the presence of a comparative stranger, Lady Selina had reassumed her manner, so natural to her, so indisputably her shining armour. The sudden change confounded Cicely. Which was the real woman?

Digitized by Google

Grimshaw addressed Cicely professionally:

"More light, Miss Chandos."

Cicely pulled back the curtains, which always slightly obscured the light, because ample folds revealed the needlework.

"That's much better."

He examined the burn, and then cut off a pad of the sterilised cotton, which he wetted with the picric solution.

"How red the burn looks!" remarked Cicely. She could see that her mother was not only grateful to the doctor, but pleased with the man. Lady Selina murmured approval.

"Your touch is as light as a woman's. What are you using?"

"Picric acid solution."

She never winced as he dressed the burn. Her tones were as light as his touch:

"Dear me! You were going to dine with us this evening! And I had ordered such a nice little dinner."

Behind Lady Selina a French window opened upon the lawn, which faced the village green. Through this window floated noises culminating in cheers.

"Please shut that window," commanded Grimshaw.

"Please don't," said the Lady of the Manor. "The atmosphere of this room is slightly oppressive. I suppose the dear souls are cheering me."

"Safety-pin, Miss Chandos."

The parson entered, blandly beaming.

"Your chauffeur has come back from Wilverley, Lady Selina. The fire engine is at the Hall, under Lord Wilverley's direction. Lord Wilverley has put the Court at your disposal, but I told him that you had accepted my own more modest shelter."

"Many thanks."

Grimshaw interposed.

Digitized by Google

"I should like you to go to bed at once."

"My dear doctor! *After* I have dined."

"*Before*. You have sustained a shock."

"I have." She smiled ironically. "But I am myself again."

Goodrich went out. From the green came raucous laughter, punctuated by groans and cat-calls. Lady Selina sat upright, frowning.

"I don't understand this noise."

"Nor I," said Cicely.

"It sounds like a sort of—a—demonstration."

She glanced interrogatively at Grimshaw, who was apparently intent upon his dressing. He said pleasantly:

"I think I can promise you that there won't be any scar."

"Not on my arm, you mean?"

"Not on your arm."

Attempting to interpret the derisive inflection of her voice, he asked lightly:

"I hope your house was well insured?"

"Oh, yes. Fully. This noise is very extraordinary."

"I think I must insist upon shutting that window, Lady Selina. It would be unwise to run risks of taking cold, you know."

"I don't take cold."

Grimshaw went to the window and closed it. Lady Selina submitted.

Stimson appeared, much perturbed.

"What is it, Stimson?"

"I've been on the green, my lady, and—and——" he broke off gaspingly.

"Bless the man! What's the matter with him?"

"Nothing, my lady. They left me alone, my lady. It's

Digitized by Google

Mr. Gridley. He—he wanted to break up the crowd. He said . . ."

"Well, what did he say?"

The unhappy Stimson, dirty and dishevelled, grasping the rags of his former dignity, replied austerely:

"I beg your ladyship's pardon; I must be excused from repeating what Mr. Gridley said. Very rough tongue he has."

Beside herself with impatience, Lady Selina rapped out:

"Am I never to get the plain truth from my own people? What has happened?"

"As I left the green, my lady, they were chasing Mr. Gridley into the pond. It isn't a deep pond, my lady, but full of horseleeches."

"I must go out at once."

"No," said Grimshaw as positively.

Cicely signed to Stimson to leave the room; he obeyed deprecatingly.

"The Riot Act must be read by me, Mr. Grimshaw. When you crossed the green just now did you notice bad temper on the part of the crowd?"

"Well, yes."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

He replied quietly:

"Because you are my patient."

"What has caused this?"

"John Exton's arrest."

"I must go at once."

She stood up. Grimshaw said firmly:

"Forgive me—it isn't safe."

Lady Salina smiled incredulously. At the same time she was sensible of Grimshaw's sympathy, of his unmistakable solicitude, expressed not so much by his voice, but by his eyes. She thought to herself: "This young man is

Digitized by Google

considerate; he has the old-fashioned protective instincts about women."

"Not safe, you mean, for your patient?"

Grimshaw never answered the question, because Goodrich came in through the French window, closing it after him; but significant sounds entered with him. Obviously some of the unruly were trespassing upon the Vicarage lawn, stamping down the moss.

"This is a revolt," said the Lady of the Manor.

Goodrich might have replied: "No, madame; it's revolution," but he was beyond quotation. In a troubled voice he delivered a message.

"Timothy Farleigh wants to see you."

"Don't see him, Mother," entreated Cicely. "You're not up to it."

"Not up to it? What an idea! I will see any of my people, or all of them, at any time."

"He is on my lawn," said Goodrich. "My privet fence is broken down."

"Can I see him here, Mr. Goodrich?"

"Certainly, if you insist."

He went out, carrying a head out of which distressed and congested eyes bulged prominently. When he came back, Timothy accompanied him. Agatha and the softy followed. Nobody noticed them. The parson shut the window. Timothy approached Lady Selina, very erect in her chair.

"What do you want?" she asked quietly.

Timothy confronted her with a dignity quite as impressive, in its way, as hers. The despairing fury had burnt itself out, partly, possibly, because his Mary was mending, partly, also, because it had served its purpose, whether designed or not—it had fired others.

"I want justice."

Lady Selina replied scornfully:

Digitized by Google

"You shall have it, I promise you. So you, *you* have raised my own people against me?"

"Aye."

He spoke impersonally, as if he were aware that he had but served as an instrument. And he continued in a low voice, pathetically apathetic:

"I ha' waited fifteen year for this hour—fifteen year."

Agatha stood beside him, still defiant. Nick, unnoticed, save by Grimshaw, crept furtively to the fireplace, apparently astonished and distressed to find no fire in it. Grimshaw leapt to the conclusion that the softy had been brought to the Vicarage purposely. Presently he would serve as an object-lesson, a notable part of Timothy's indictment.

"You can say what you have to say," observed Lady Selina. "Apparently you are here to speak for some of your neighbours?" He nodded. "Very well—speak."

Timothy prepared himself for a tremendous effort, how tremendous none can understand who is not intimately acquainted with the rustic mind, almost atrophied by disuse, when it attempts to measure itself against authority. Grimshaw, waching him closely, reflected that his attitude and expression were more eloquent than any speech could be. Bent and bowed by interminable toil, his gnarled hands trembling with agitation, he spoke very slowly:

"You might ha' been burned this day along wi' your gert house. . . ."

"True."

No rancour could be detected in her voice. Grimshaw wondered what she was feeling. Her perfect manners might have misled a less acute observer, but he divined somehow that she, also, was intensely affected, blind for the moment because a cataract had been torn from her eyes.

"Be you prepared to die, my lady?"

Digitized by Google

At this the parson raised a protesting finger. To break through his privet fence was a grave misdemeanour; to trespass upon his spiritual domain in his presence palsied a tongue apter at asking rather than answering such direct questions. However, Lady Selina replied courteously:

"Why do you put such a question?"

"I puts it to 'ee. We brings nothing into this world, and we takes nothing out. But the reckonin' must be paid. What ha' you done, my lady, wi' us? We've worked for 'ee . . . crool hard, at a low wage."

He stretched out his rough hands, palms uppermost, revealing the scars and callouses, but quite unconscious of them.

"You could have left my service, Timothy Farleigh, if you thought the work too hard and the wage too low."

"Aye. Fair warning I had fifteen years ago, when my lil' maids died. I might ha' gone then, but someways I couldn't leave the old land, and so—God forgi' me—I stayed. We pore souls, my lady, bain't free. . . . We be, seemin'ly, just beasts o' burden, your beasts—under your yoke."

Lady Selina never flinched from his intent gaze. Grimshaw was unable to decide whether indeed her clear blue eyes were fixing upon the trembling speaker or upon herself. Could she see him as he thus revealed himself? Could she see herself with anything approximating to true definition? She said firmly enough:

"My yoke has not been heavy; you know that."

His hands fell to his sides.

"I knows what you ha' done; and I knows what you ha' left undone. We be housed lil' better than the beasts o' the field. We be kept helpless a-purpose."

Lady Selina glanced at Agatha's tense face.

"No. Your niece here has risen above her station, and I

Digitized by Google

helped her. Whether such help was wisely given is another matter."

"Aggie be a clever maid. I speaks for us as bain't clever. I speaks," his voice rang out emphatically, "for every man in Upworthy as has a wife and lil' 'uns to lose, if so be as you remains blind and deaf to the writin' on your own smoulderin' walls. Better, I says, far better that you should ha' perished this day wi' your grand house than live on wi' your heel upon our bodies and our hearts."

His words, coming from such a man, amazed Grimshaw. And yet they confirmed an ever-increasing conviction that true inspiration is kindled from without, that Man is indeed but the receiver and transmitter of a purpose far transcending finite intelligence. No trained orator could have chosen better words than these which had fallen, like water from a rock, out of the mouth of a peasant. Grimshaw watched their effect. They had brought softening dews to the eyes of Agatha and Cicely; they had penetrated the parson's hide-bound understanding. He stood agape in his own drawing-room, deflated, thinking, possibly, of Balaam's ass. Lady Selina seemed to be petrified. Nick alone remained indifferent, the usual grin upon his face. He had taken from a pocket a match, and was contemplating the neatly laid fire, obsessed—so Grimshaw decided—with the desire to light it.

Lady Selina replied, after a pause. What she said came from within, as sincere, in one sense, as the message from without. Grimshaw realised that she was delivering a message, a tradition rather, entrusted to her keeping. Her brother, her father, all her distinguished ancestors would have spoken the same words in exactly the same tone.

"I have listened to you patiently, Timothy Farleigh. Listen to me. I am not blind to the writing on my smouldering walls. And one word stands out flaming—Ingratitude!

Digitized by Google

You come here asking for justice. Justice shall be meted out to you. And now go!"

She pointed to the door. Timothy hesitated.

"You be a hard 'ooman. But Johnny Exton be innocent. Let 'un out—let 'un out, I says."

"My house has been burnt. If John Exton didn't do it, who did?"

"I dunno."

"Exactly."

Grimshaw moved nearer to her.

"I think I know," he said, almost in a whisper, because he was humbly aware that inspiration had descended upon him. Lady Selina repeated his words:

"You think you know, Mr. Grimshaw?"

He beckoned to Nick, saying in his kindliest tone:

"Come you here, my lad."

The softy shambled up to him. Grimshaw sat down upon a chair near the fireplace, assuming an easy attitude, but his eyes caught and held the eyes of the boy.

"I bain't afeard of 'ee, I bain't."

"Of course not. I wish I was as brave as you, Nicky."

The softy swelled with pride. The others stared at Grimshaw, who dominated them as he did the stunted intelligence in front of him. He continued lightly:

"Shall I tell you a secret?"

"Ah-h-h!"

"I am a bit afeard of somebody. Guess."

An unexpected answer introduced a touch of comedy. Nick grinned broadly:

"I knows—Miss Cicely."

For an instant Grimshaw was disconcerted; Cicely blushed. Fortunately nobody perceived this.

"No, no. I am afeard of George Ball, the constable."

The shot went home. Nick squirmed.

Digitized by Google

"George Ball!"

"Aye. Sit on that stool, my lad. Listen to me." Nick obeyed, staring up at the keen face bent over his own. "Let's have a little chat. I like you, Nicky."

"Do 'ee, now? I likes you; yas, I do." He grinned again, adding slily: "An' so does Miss Cicely."

This second allusion challenged Lady Selina's attention. She turned to glance at her daughter, but, happily, the tell-tale blushed had faded.

"Do you ever smoke cigarettes, Nick?"

"Times, I do, when fellers gi' me some."

"Have one with me."

He held out his cigarette-case. Nick selected one; Grimshaw took another, saying lightly:

"Have you a match?"

"Yas."

A murmur from Agatha nearly broke the spell. Nick, however, intent upon Grimshaw, opened his left hand, and revealed a match, a wax vesta. Grimshaw took it, looked at it, and smiled ingratiatingly:

"What a nice wax match!"

"Aye, same as quality use."

Grimshaw struck the match on his heel.

"Light up!"

He leaned forward and downward. Nick lighted his cigarette, puffing at it complacently. Grimshaw lighted his, and then blew out the match. With his face still close to Nick's, he asked suddenly:

"But where is the match-box?"

"I dunno. I lost 'un."

"What bad luck! You found a silver match-box this afternoon and lost it inside of—of an hour?"

"Yas, I did. How do 'ee know that?"

Digitized by Google

"I'm a doctor. I can see inside your head. Shall I give you a shilling?"

"Yas."

Grimshaw took a shilling from his pocket, flicked it into the air, and caught it. Then, with a laugh, he held it out. Nick tried to take it. Grimshaw deftly palmed it. Nick was confounded.

"It be gone. You be a wondersome man, you be."

"Hallo! Here it is again—in your ear, by Jove!"

He exhibited the shilling to the excited boy, flicked it up again and allowed it to drop on the carpet.

"It's yours, Nicky."

Nick picked up the shilling, going down on his knees. As he rose to his feet Grimshaw stood up, taking him gently by the shoulder:

"I say, tell me something. Why did you set my lady's house afire?"

Once more, inarticulate murmurs from those present might have broken the spell, but Nick was too absorbed in his possession of the shilling. He answered seriously:

"I dunno."

Grimshaw was not satisfied. He tried another tack, saying lightly:

"You know, Nick, I often want to burn houses myself."

"Do 'ee?"

"Why did you do it, my lad?"

"To please father."

"To please father, eh? Did he ask you to do it."

"No-o-o."

"Johnny Exton may say that he burnt the big house."

Nick replied jealously:

"Not he. Johnny bain't brave enough for that. 'Twas me done it. I be allers ready for a lark."

Grimshaw turned to Lady Selina.

Digitized by Google

"Are you satisfied?"

"Yes. I—I am infinitely obliged to you."

Agatha exclaimed fervently:

"God bless you, sir!"

Lady Selina had spoken stiffly, still erect in her chair. And she gazed mournfully at Nick, not at Grimshaw.

"Nick."

"Yes, my lady?"

"Do you hate me?"

All softies are extremely sensitive to the tones of the voice. Nick must have felt the hostility which Lady Selina had purposely veiled. He replied sullenly:

"I be saft along o' you. You bain't so good as the Lard."

"The Lord?"

"Him as lives Wilverley way. Upworthy pegs we be called by Wilverley folk."

His fatuous grin was unendurable. Lady Selina winced. Grimshaw interposed hastily:

"That will do, Nick."

Agatha added as quickly:

"You come home along with father and me."

"Yes," murmured Lady Selina. "Take him away. John Exton shall be released from custody at once." She added bitterly to Timothy: "You see what your words have done."

He replied starkly:

"Upworthy be a whited sepulchre, naught but a whited sepulchre."

II

The tension was relaxed slightly after the Farleighs had left the room. At once Lady Selina instructed Goodrich, as magistrate, to take the necessary steps to deliver John Exton out of durance vile. As she was speaking, cheers were heard outside. Goodrich, peering out, announced that

Digitized by Google

the villagers were leaving the lawn. He mentioned that dinner would be ready in a quarter of an hour, adding:

"May I prescribe a glass of champagne for your patient, Grimshaw?"

Lady Selina said wearily:

"You are very kind. I shall go to bed."

"Please," murmured Grimshaw.

The parson went out. Lady Selina lay back in her chair, closing her eyes. Cicely glanced anxiously at Grimshaw. Had the inevitable reaction set in? Grimshaw approached his patient, and laid his hand upon her wrist. She opened her eyes.

"I'm rather tired. That's all."

"No wonder." He held her wrist for half a minute, saying reassuringly: "Your pulse is excellent. Some light food in bed and a night's rest will quite restore you."

She nodded. He was about to take leave of her when she said abruptly: "What did that poor boy mean by saying that he was born soft along of me?"

Grimshaw answered with slight constraint:

"As to that, I have the facts at second-hand. Some six months before he was born his mother had diphtheria. She was distracted about that time by the death of her two little girls from the same disease."

"I see. Would that account for this boy being born wanting?"

"It might."

Lady Selina refused to accept this as final. The constraint in Grimshaw's voice had not escaped her.

"But in your opinion, with such facts as you have, it did, didn't it?"

"Well, yes."

"Good-night, Mr. Grimshaw; and very many thanks."

He bowed and went out.

Digitized by Google

III

As he crossed the green he noticed that the villagers had left it. Cheering, at a distance, lent colour to the hypothesis that John Exton's release would lead to more ale-drinking. After that Upworthy would forgive and forget. On the morrow, popular feeling would be as flat as the dregs of ale left in the big tankards.

Lady Selina would not forget.

His feeling for her was now one of intensest pity, and, as he walked, he beheld himself as the fateful instrument by which fresh laceration must be inflicted. She had thanked him civilly for his services, but she had not held out her uninjured hand, simply because his final expression of opinion ranked him amongst her critics. Very few women of the better sort, conscious, as they are, of self-sacrifice to what they conceive to be duty, can endure criticism. He knew, also, that he had disappointed Cicely, too young and too loving a daughter not to resent plain-speaking if it hurt an already stricken creature. Many a gallant gentleman, he reflected, would have lied convincingly at such a moment.

Dinner was awaiting him at Mrs. Rockram's, but he had no appetite. To distract attention from himself, he decided to walk up to the Hall and see what was left of it. Mounting the gentle slopes of the park, fatigue assailed him afresh; every bone in his body seemed to be aching. But the storm had passed away, leaving clear skies and a delicious freshness of atmosphere. He stopped to inhale the odours of grateful earth.

In the mid-distance he could see the walls of the house, still standing. Smoke ascended from them and steam, for the Wilverley fire engine was at work. He could hear the sharp rap of the pistons. The roof had vanished; out

Digitized by Google

of the blackened walls, like sightless eyes, glared what had been windows, the windows that reflected so gloriously the setting sun.

An ancient home had been destroyed.

It would be rebuilt, of course, with all modern improvements, electric light, bathrooms, and labour-saving devices —a change for the better, so Mrs. Grundy would affirm. Lady Selina would not think so. Could she, could anybody of her age adjust themselves to new conditions?

When he reached the lawn he was greeted by two energetic persons, Arthur Wilverley and Tiddy. In a few words Wilverley stated that his labours were ended. The stables and some outbuildings had been saved. He added:

"Lady Selina ought to have had a small engine here."

He looked exuberantly strong and fit, with no air of the dejected and rejected lover about him. Here was one who could adapt himself to new conditions. Presently he led Grimshaw aside and listened attentively to a terse recital of what had happened in Upworthy, laughing heartily when he heard of Gridley and the horsepond, expressing sympathy tempered by humour for Lady Selina.

"If this wakes her up, Grimshaw, all will be well."

Grimshaw made no reply. Wilverley continued in a different tone:

"Ought I to see her to-night before I go home?"

"As her doctor I'm afraid I must veto that."

"Thank you; I understand. I shall write. Miss Tiddle wants to see Miss Chandos. I can wait in the car." Then, sensible of constraint in Grimshaw's manner, and misinterpreting it, he added frankly: "You are a good chap; you can size up a delicate situation. I will say this to you. This fire has burnt away some humiliation. I believe that good must crop out. If I can help, I will. Miss Tiddle feels as I do—a remarkable girl that!"

Digitized by Google

"Yes."

"You look rather fagged."

"I have a touch of malaria on me."

They sauntered back to the engine. Wilverley described with enthusiasm Miss Tiddle's executive abilities. Under her capable direction all the more valuable pictures, porcelain and plate had been stored in the coach-house. Other outbuildings held furniture and household stores.

"That young lady can get a move on," declared Wilverley.

Grimshaw wondered whether he was contrasting Miss Tiddle with Cicely, not to the advantage of the latter. Quite sincerely he hoped that it might be so. In time—Wilverley would take time—Miss Tiddle might play Jill to his Jack. They would mount the hill of life together, and not trouble down it. The pail of water carried by such a pair would be used to irrigate the waste patches of others. He refused a lift back to the village in the big car, and watched it whirl off, Wilverley at the wheel and Miss Tiddle beside him.

IV

By this time Lady Selina was a-bed and Cicely was dining tête-à-tête with the parson. You may be sure that the good man played the host in the old-fashioned way. Port mellowed him, banishing disagreeable reflections. Cicely, unable to peer beneath a polished surface, tried to reflect herself in that surface and stared ruefully at a very blurred image. The parson's slightly patronising tone when speaking of Grimshaw irritated her intensely, the more so because he laid an insistent finger upon what had irritated her.

"Your dear mother is no more responsible than I am. Why didn't he say so? Heaven knows she needed a word

Digitized by Google

of comfort. As her medical attendant, it was the man's positive duty to cheer her up."

Cicely said bravely:

"Mr. Goodrich, forgive me, but aren't we all partly responsible?"

He blinked at her and sipped his wine.

"In a way, m'yes. Collectively the responsibility must be divided up. I deprecate violence."

"So does Mr. Grimshaw."

"Of course, he's an outsider, and something of an iconoclast. A square peg, I grant you, in a round hole."

"You admit that Upworthy is a hole?"

He blinked again, but the juice of the grape fortified him.

"It lies low; hence these grievous visitations. I remain loyal to Upworthy and your dear mother."

The parlour-maid told her that Miss Tiddle was in the drawing-room.

"I'll see her at once."

Cicely rushed into Tiddy's warm embrace.

"I want you more than anybody else," she declared fervently.

"I've five minutes."

Two of these precious minutes were devoted to details, but Cicely apparently took for granted what had been accomplished at the Hall. And, to Tiddy's astonishment, she seemed equally indifferent to the exciting events on the green. She held Tiddy's hand, squeezing it.

"When can I see you, Tiddy? I must see you. I must have a long talk."

"Long talks are nearly always too long. You've something on your chest. Now pull up your socks and pin up your skirts and out with it. Wait! I'll bet daddy's pile that you and the Man with the Disconcerting Eyes have been passing more than the time o' day."

Digitized by Google

"You're wonderful," Cicely admitted.

"I'm alive," remarked Miss Tiddle, complacently. "And my shot wasn't a fluke; I played for it. What does dear mother say?"

"That's it. She doesn't know."

"Nor do I yet. But I take it that you have really bounced out of the frying-pan into the fire?"

"Yes; I have."

"I'm delighted to hear it. There *is* stuff in you, but only a can-opener, like me, is able to get it out. So the signal is S. O. S., eh?"

"Yes. Why can't you sleep with me to-night?"

"Because I'm on duty, apart from other reasons. What are you going to do? Hide your head in the sand?"

"I don't know what to do."

Tiddy's eyes sparkled.

"*He* does, though."

Cicely answered evasively:

"A man's methods are always so brutal."

"That's why really we love them. If I keep Lord Wilverley waiting he'll be brutal; but for your sake I'll risk that. Shall I tell you what to do?"

"Please!"

"Scrap the buskins! You can't act for nuts. Nor can he. Both of you will give the show away if you try dissembling—always a rotten game."

"Have you seen Mr. Grimshaw?"

"I left him up at the Hall."

Cicely's eyes softened.

"And he hasn't had dinner."

"He didn't look as if he wanted dinner. But I'm sure he wants you—desperately. He appeared to me worn and torn to tatters. Make no error; you can't rig him up in your moss."

Digitized by Google

"There's not much moss left."

"Lots of it, believe me. I haven't time to argue with you, Cis. I can make a guess at what's in your mind, because, as I say, you're easy to read, a big asset, if you knew it, and probably the thing that appeals tremendously to Mr. Grimshaw. If he begins to think you're not straight he'll fly the track."

"Not straight!"

Tiddy answered impatiently:

"You want to have it both ways. You are most awfully sorry for your mother; you would like to be sweet to her, to play the devoted daughter; but what will all that sort of thing be worth when she finds you out? And she will. You want to be just as sweet, perhaps sweeter, to Mr. Grimshaw, and all the time he'll see you playing a part with your mother, and, worse, forcing him to do the same. Really, you're risking his love and your mother's respect."

Cicely frowned. Moss-scraping hurts.

"I suppose you'd rush in to mother, and, on top of this awful calamity, hit her hard on the head when she's lying down."

"If you speak of the fire, I don't regard it as an awful calamity; nor do you. As to speaking to-night, that is absurd. To-morrow, or the day after, will be time enough. I am much sorrier for her than I am for you. I can measure her disappointment, but I can't measure your folly if you play the wrong game. And now—I must hop it."

"When are you going to France, Tiddy?"

"Why should I go to France?"

This was rank evasion, and Tiddy, challenged to practise what she had preached, knew it. A little red flowed into her cheeks.

"Because you told me that was your intention."

Digitized by Google

"Well, we all change our minds, don't we? I'm doing my bit here, and like the job. So that's that."

Her curls were a-flutter as she went out.

Cicely stood still listening, till she heard the purr of the big car. The thought came to her, as it had come to Grimshaw, that Tiddy was not going to France because she had more than liking for her present job. Jealous pangs assailed her. If Tiddy wanted Arthur she would get him.

And why not?

Presently she went upstairs to sit beside her mother. To her astonishment Lady Selina, fortified by soup and a cutlet, declared herself ready to discuss present and future.

"We can't impose ourselves upon Mr. Goodrich, my dear, and Danecourt, under the circumstances, would be too depressing. Heaven alone knows when we shall get into our own house again. A fairly comfortable flat in London seems the one thing possible."

"Oh! London!"

"I said London—not Timbuctoo. Do you object to London?"

"N-no."

Lady Selina eyed her daughter sharply. As a matter of fact, she had thought of London entirely on Cicely's account. Her own friends were living quietly in the country, more or less engrossed by patriotic work. London, she felt, would distract the child. And she hated flats.

"Would you prefer Bournemouth?"

A derisive inflection underlay the question. Lady Selina detested popular watering-places and big hotels, where food you didn't want was placed before you at stated hours, and even earls' daughters were known by chambermaids as numbers!

"Bournemouth! No."

Digitized by Google

Perhaps you will tell me what you would like before I try to go to sleep."

Hunted into a corner, Cicely said hastily:

"There is Happy Mead, isn't there?"

Happy Mead, with its preposterous name, had long been a source of unhappiness to Lady Selina, because, in accordance with her principles, she had declined to spend much money upon a dilapidated house, tenantless for more years than she dared to reckon. Too big for people of small means, and not likely to appeal to the well-to-do accustomed to modern comforts, it was situated about a mile from Upworthy in a pretty but neglected garden.

"That ruin! What a suggestion!" She continued irritably: "I don't pretend to understand you, Cicely. I should have thought that a girl not absolutely devoid of pride would have seen the propriety of leaving her own county for a season if she was offered the chance."

Chandos silence countered this observation, and, looking at Cicely's firm little chin, Lady Selina told herself that the child had really very little of the Danecourt pride. Having taken her own line over a stiff country, she would stick to it. The mother went on after a pause:

"I dislike London in war-time, but we must go there."

Having delivered this ultimatum, Lady Selina indicated by her manner that she intended to compose herself to sleep, adding:

"I expect to lie awake half the night."

However, Grimshaw, it appeared, had provided against this unpleasant probability. A mild sleeping-draught was sent from Pawley's dispensary. Cicely, when she administered the Lethean liquid, regretted that so thoughtful a man had not sent enough for two.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XII

RECONSTRUCTION

I

GRIMSHAW remained at the Manor for about half an hour after Wilverley had left. To his astonishment he discovered that the fire, from the point of view of Lady Selina's servants, was regarded as a blessing in disguise. An enormous quantity of rubbish had been destroyed, the accumulation of generations. It appeared, also, that dry-rot in the ancient timbers had caused much anxiety and expense. And an immense roof had leaked persistently.

None the less, Grimshaw gazed at the still smoking ruins with sorrowful eyes. A clever architect would be able to preserve these. The significance of this penetrated into Grimshaw's mind. Certain elementary things seemed destined to endure in a world of chance and decay. Insensibly, he began to compare persons with things. The insoluble problem of heredity and environment presented itself. It was difficult to envisage Lady Selina Chandos in a new house. Would modern improvements affect her? He remembered that Cicely had denied the possibility of earthquakes in English villages. And within a few hours an earthquake had taken place, something cataclysmic, to which, willy-nilly, the lady of the manor must adapt herself.

He returned to his lodgings to swallow food without appetite. Then he went to the dispensary to prepare Lady Selina's sleeping-draught. In the dispensary word came to him that Dr. Pawley wished to see him, not—so it turned out—professionally. Indeed, the exciting events seemed to have had a tonic effect. Pawley, very alert, had become a

Digitized by Google

lively note of interrogation, asking eager questions, interpolating shrewd remarks, alive to the humours of the situation but full of sympathy for Lady Selina.

"Has it been an eye-opener?" he asked.

"I hope so."

"I suppose I know the dear woman better than anybody else, better, perhaps, than she knows herself. She has all the virtues of her class—fortitude, courtesy, sincerity and pluck."

"You can say as much of some of her dependents. Isaac Burble, for instance, and old Stimson."

"True. Extremes meet. I like to think of that. The trouble becomes acute when extremes don't meet. In a sense I have always regarded her as short-circuited."

Grimshaw nodded. Pawley's never-failing interest in others invited confidence. And his advice would be sincere and helpful. The impulse to tell his secret became irresistible. He began tentatively:

"The breaking of the Wilverley-Chandos engagement rather upset you, didn't it?"

"For the moment. I was so sorry for the mother. And it meant so much to the village. We old bachelors are confirmed matchmakers. Yes, yes; it upset me, but I can admit frankly that I left little Cicely out of my reckoning. She didn't want a good fellow, and she cut loose from him. The why and wherefore are beyond me, but the essential fact suffices."

"Perhaps she cared for somebody else?"

Pawley shook his head.

"No, no; in that case I venture to think that I should have had an inkling, eh? Since she came out, the child has met nobody—*nobody*."

Grimshaw laughed.

"Exactly. Now be prepared for a shock. I'm nobody. In Lady Selina's eyes that describes me to a dot."

Digitized by Google

Pawley was not dense, but, for an instant, he was befogged, and Grimshaw realised this, and with it the inevitable conclusion that even his friend and colleague regarded him, like Lady Selina, as negligible. He smiled derisively: and the smile was illuminating. Pawley understood.

"Good Lord! I've been blind."

"There wasn't much to see. I was blind myself till yesterday. And then, suddenly, I saw. I'll add this to you. I fell in love with her five minutes after I met her. When I scraped that midge out of her eye the big thing happened. I fought against it. Yesterday I succumbed. She—she cares for me, bless her!"

"You mean it's settled?"

"Settled! I wonder if anything more unsettling to all concerned could have happened."

Pawley remained silent, a silence misapprehended by Grimshaw, who reflected, naturally enough, that congratulation was deemed impossible. But the elder man had embarked upon a long pilgrimage at racing speed. He was whirled back to those far-off days when he, a nobody, aspired to enter a guarded pleasaunce, with its conspicuous notice: "Trespassers Beware!" He had entered it and left it—alone. Ever since he had remained alone a festering fact. His kindly eyes rested upon Grimshaw's tired face. He held out his thin hand.

"Can I help you to win through?"

His sympathy was so unexpected after a long silence that Grimshaw stammered a reply:

"You—you think I am w-w-worthy?"

Pawley gripped the hand in his.

"If you can ask that question sincerely, you are. I take it Lady Selina doesn't know?"

Grimshaw plunged into fluent speech. When he finished, Pawley was in possession of what had passed between the lovers, of the compromise exacted by Cicely, of its effect

Digitized by Google

upon Grimshaw. He listened with pursed-up lips and frowning brows. Then he delivered his considered judgment:

"You are stumbling along in ruts. Where have they led me? Where have they led Goodrich? Come out of them, my dear fellow. Cicely is wrong. But there is every excuse for her."

"Then Lady Selina is not to be 'spared'?"

Pawley made a deprecating gesture.

"Has Omnipotence spared her? The longer I live, Grimshaw, the more amazed I am at human fallibility. We mean well, most of us, and we do ill. And ill follows our benevolent efforts. Per contra, good rises out of evil. Anyway, compromise has been the curse of my life." He paused, adding in a lower tone: "Compromise came between me and the woman I loved. It was too much for both of us. Be honest with Lady Selina. It's your best chance. In her heart, and it's a big heart, she must have a measure of contempt for poor old Goodrich and me, because we have kowtowed to her."

"If I could get at her heart—— I have a weapon——"

"A weapon?" Pawley winced at the word. "What sort of weapon?"

"It would lose some of its edge if I showed it to you. I shall not use it unless I am driven to do so."

Pawley was too courteous to ask for further explanation.

II

Grimshaw returned to the Rockram cottage much the better for his talk with Pawley, but conscious, also, that a wise old man was not optimistic in regard to his chances. He had the wit and the will to plead his case strongly. The real issue, so he reflected, lay between strength and obstinacy.

Mrs. Rockram was awaiting him.

Digitized by Google

"You made a pore dinner, sir, and I thought, maybe, you'd fancy some nice hot soup."

"Bless your kind heart, I do."

As he ate his soup, she hovered about him, eager to talk over the fire and the soul-stirring events on the green. Knowing her to be a faithful servant of the House of Chandos and devoted to its mistress, he yielded to the temptation to draw from her some expression of opinion. Obviously she sided with Authority.

"My lady'll never be the same again, never!"

"In what way do you think she will change?"

"The ingratitude of 'em'll eat into her bones."

"Ah! Lady Selina used that word."

Mrs. Rockram expressed the positive opinion that no other word could be used by a perfect lady. Emboldened by Grimshaw's silence, she went on:

"I know my place, sir, but I did pass the remark to Rockram: 'Her ladyship'll up and leave us,' I says, 'to stew in our own sauce.'"

"I can't see her ladyship outside Upworthy."

"Maybe. But I have seen her. In my day we went to London every year."

"And am I to infer, Mrs. Rockram, that her ladyship is a different woman away from Upworthy?"

Mrs. Rockram rebuked him delicately.

"A lady, like my lady, is a *lady* wherever she may be. But in the room we used to remark that her ladyship in town was different."

"In what way? This is interesting."

"Rockram was butler in them days. The little I knows I gets from him. My lady took things easier in Curzon Street, never fussed like. Very popular she was, too, with the *crême de la crême*."

"I dare say your good cooking had something to do with that."

Digitized by Google

"Maybe. There was no pinching in those days—the best of everything. And no trouble neither. The best came to the kitchen door."

"It doesn't now, not even in London."

"Well, sir, all I says is that my lady is at the age when peace and comfort come first. If she can't get 'em here, she'll go elsewhere; and quite right, too."

Left alone, Grimshaw smoked a pipe before turning in. Tobacco, however, failed to soothe him. Mrs. Rockram's words rankled. Peace and comfort! Peace at any price! With war raging over all the civilised world, who wouldn't set an extravagant value on peace? The merely material difficulty of rebuilding her house, with every able-bodied man in khaki, might drive Lady Selina out of Upworthy. And once out, once settled in a snug town house, would she return?

III

At eleven next morning he crossed the green to dress Lady Selina's arm. Upworthy presented to his critical eye no apparent change from the normal. What villagers he met greeted him with a sheepish and apologetic air. Ebullition of feeling had simmered away. Even Timothy Farleigh had reassumed his bovine mask, although his face was brighter, Mary being decidedly better, and likely to improve from hour to hour. Agatha thanked him effusively, on her marrow-bones before his "cleverness." She repeated the same phrase again and again:

"Oh! you are clever, sir; you saved us all, you did."

"A bit of luck. I saw the wax vesta in the boy's hand."

"And so did I, sir. It told me just nothing, nothing."

"You were too excited to notice trifles at such a time." He paused, adding significantly: "Are you still excited?"

She flushed a little, hesitating, but constrained to candour beneath his kindly glance.

Digitized by Google

"Things can't go on as they are, sir, can they?"

Her tone was interrogative, not defiant. Recognising the change in her mental attitude, he said genially:

"Things never do go on as they are, nor persons. The progress of the world is intermittent; and it rolls on in curves, now up, now down, but the mean level is steadily rising. Ill-considered speech and action clog the wheels. You can give a motor too much lubricating oil, can't you?"

"I am very sorry that I misunderstood you, sir."

With these heartening words he left the Farleigh cottage and walked more briskly to the Vicarage.

Cicely, you may be sure, contrived to see him alone for a minute. From her manner he could divine nothing of her feelings, because they met in the small hall within reach of curious eyes and ears. He fancied that her hand lay cold in his. And her expression was troubled.

"Your mother has passed a bad night?"

"Mother slept soundly, thanks to your draught. She's up; in the drawing-room. She insists on going to London at once. We are likely to stay there for several months."

"I see."

"But do you see? I can't." Her voice was almost piteous. "Perhaps it's for the best. I don't know. And she talks of sending the family solicitor down here to deal with Snitterfield and Gridley. But he's an old fossil. They'll twist him round their fingers. Can't you coax her into staying here?"

"I am not very sanguine of succeeding where you have failed."

He followed her into the drawing-room, where Lady Selina was enthroned in a large chair, with energy exuding from her. Grimshaw did the little that was necessary. He had to admit that the burn was not serious. Cicely could attend to it. Lady Selina said briskly:

"I want to talk to you, Mr. Grimshaw. Please sit down.

Digitized by Google

Cicely, my dear, you needn't go. You are vitally concerned in what I have to say."

Cicely betrayed slight nervousness. Grimshaw sat down near Lady Selina. He perceived that she was overbrimming with considered speech.

"I awoke with a clear mind," she affirmed. "I have had an object-lesson, not wasted upon me, I can assure you. I admit that I have been blind to what has been going on under my nose. And I can take into consideration the—the —a—consideration that has been, not too wisely, given to me. Enough of that. I can't, under the circumstances, call in Lord Wilverley, as you suggested. But there are others. My own solicitor, for instance. I shall instruct him to institute a sort of court of inquiry here. He will know how to deal with this man Snitterfield and our Inspector of Nuisances."

"Will he?" asked Grimshaw quietly.

Lady Selina answered with slight acerbity:

"Of course he will. Before he meets these men, I shall ask him to have a talk with you. Out of the chaos of yesterday, one phrase bites deeply into my memory. I was told by Timothy Farleigh that my village is a whited sepulchre. You didn't contradict him."

The unhappy Cicely wriggled in her chair. Grimshaw remained silent. Lady Selina continued inexorably:

"It is possible, Mr. Grimshaw, that you didn't contradict him because you share his opinion of Upworthy. Do you?"

Cicely interposed hastily:

"Mother, do wait till you are yourself again."

"Nonsense, child! I am very much myself this morning. Who wouldn't be after such an awakening? Mr. Grimshaw will do me the justice to believe that I am in no mood to spare myself or anybody else. If Mr. Grimshaw honestly thinks that Upworthy is a whited sepulchre, let him say so."

"Mother. I entreat you!"

Digitized by Google

Lady Selina waved her hand impatiently.

"I must find out what the doctor of the parish thinks. I detest evasions. Heaven knows we have had enough of them."

Grimshaw replied eagerly:

"I am sorely tempted to evade your question, Lady Selina. And I could do so easily. But you have chosen to raise the big issue between us, and I dare not shirk it. *I dare not shirk it.*" He repeated the words so sorrowfully that she eyed him more attentively. After the pause he went on: "The metaphor may be crude and harsh. It is. I should not have chosen it myself. But conditions are fundamentally wrong here, as I ventured to hint to you at our very first meeting."

"Hints! Hints! Let us away with hints. Please tell me this: If—if conditions are so fundamentally wrong here—which I don't admit—why are you working here? Why did you come back to—to a whited sepulchre?"

Her tone became indescribably ironic, charged, too, with a feeling that she was unable to suppress. Feeling always engenders feeling. Something about Grimshaw, the conviction that he was intensely moved, moved her. She scented mystery. And immediately this suspicion was heightened as she intercepted a glance of Cicely's directed full at Grimshaw, a supplicating glance, beseeching forbearance and patience. 'Tiddy had predicted aright. Cicely was no actress. Grimshaw, unable for his part to dissemble, returned the glance. Obviously there was an understanding, or a misunderstanding, between these two. In a harder voice Lady Selina addressed the silent Grimshaw.

"Why do you look at my daughter? That boy, last night, said that you were afraid of her. Why? Is there any sort of—of league between you?"

The hunted Cicely burst out:

"A common desire to spare you."

Digitized by Google

"To spare me? Thank you for nothing. I demand the truth. Why is Mr. Grimshaw, a clever, distinguished man, working here under conditions which he holds to be fundamentally wrong?"

Throughout this interview, so poignantly illuminating, Grimshaw had been sensible of Lady Selina's sincerity and intelligence. He had never doubted the former; the latter gave him pause. Granting that she was really intelligent, an acute observer, why had she drifted into this *impasse?* Then he remembered what Pawley had said of her, her utter lack of business training, the stigma of all women of her class, and behind this the inherited instinct to move slowly in an appointed groove. Out of this groove she had been rudely shaken. For the first time she had a glimpse of what such women might accomplish if they were freed from the fetters of tradition and convention. He replied calmly:

"What governs most of our actions, Lady Selina? Self-interest. Self-interest lured me into staying here against my better judgment. Self-interest brought me back to Upworthy, although I knew that the basic conditions were not likely to be changed."

"Self-interest?" She slowly repeated the two odious words, evidently puzzled, but keenly alert. "I can't for the life of me see where self-interest comes in. Making due allowance for your modesty, Mr. Grimshaw, I fail to follow you. A big town is the place for you, not a country parish. You are the nephew of a distinguished London physician. You must know, better than I do, that self-interest, if you are speaking professionally, ought to have kept you away from Upworthy."

"I was not speaking professionally."

"Oh-h-h!"

"I have been weak; something, too, of a coward; but I promise you that self-interest is going to be scrapped here and now."

Digitized by Google

"I am utterly at a loss——!"

"You will be enlightened at once."

He stood up, the light from the windows falling full upon his face.

"I have stayed here because I love your daughter."

IV

Lady Selina gasped as she sat rigid in her chair, but of the three she was the first to recover self-possession. Cicely, absolutely unprepared, remained tremblingly silent. Grimshaw was too moved to say more. After an interminable pause, he heard the autocrat's soft, derisive voice:

"My son, Brian, warned me against that possibility, and I laughed at him—I laughed at him."

Grimshaw spoke less calmly.

"I am not ashamed of loving her, but I am ashamed of trying to win a wife by playing the humbug and hypocrite."

Lady Selina tried in vain to assimilate this. He loved Cicely; did she love him? The girl was now, apparently, in one of her absurd trances, looking exactly like her father. The mother was familiar with these curious seizures, but Grimshaw knew nothing of them. Cicely seemed to be turned into stone. She looked cold as marble. Beneath this impassive surface a battle was raging, as before, between the two Cicelys. The body remained aloof and inert. To the old Cicely Grimshaw's declaration seemed brutally inopportune. Without consulting her, he had sunk all the little boats, a tiny fleet, which carried her plans and hopes. She felt that she was swamped with them, foundering helplessly in mid-channel with the farther shore almost within sight. With so much at stake, why had he acted so precipitately? At such moment, odd phrases obsess the mind. She kept on repeating to herself a French sentence learnt at school, an exercise in articulation:

"Je me précipite,

Digitized by Google

"Tu te précipites,
"Il se précipite."

Grimshaw was confounded, as he stared at her, and instantly he, too, became the prey of mental civil war. Doubt assailed him. He was racked by the tormenting thought that his judgment had been cruelly at fault. Conscious that he had risen to opportunity, that he had soared high above mean and material considerations, he seemed to be looking down upon his beloved grovelling in the dust of the ages—dust of that dust—disintegrating before his eyes——! Impetuously he spoke:

"I can, of course, leave Upworthy."

Lady Selina hesitated, but not for long. She observed coldly:

"Under the circumstances, Mr. Grimshaw, that is the wise thing to do."

The hypercritical may affirm that it was not, under the circumstances, the wise thing for a mother to say, inasmuch as it forced into action an apparently apathetic and dazed creature. For the moment, Cicely remained as before. Then, with a sharp exclamation, she stood up—revitalised, quickened incredibly. She seemed to Grimshaw to expand from a girl into a woman, a complete individuality, self-reliant, capable, almost dominating; the new Cicely, the daughter of strenuous times, born of them, exulting in them, as fresh as Aphrodite when she rose from the waves.

"I shall go with him."

Swiftly she crossed to his side, lifting a radiant face to his. Then she addressed her mother, speaking very softly, but clearly, with enchanting tenderness.

"I love him as devotedly as he loves me."

Lady Selina shivered, as if seized by a rigor. In a pathological sense this had indeed happened. A rigor of the mind caused a sort of collapse. She lay back in her chair, closing her eyes. Cicely hastened to her.

Digitized by Google

"Mother, this is a dreadful surprise to you. But you love me, don't you? You won't be unkind?"

A dreary voice, hardly recognisable, answered her:

"In a few hours I have lost my house, my people, and my daughter."

v

Cicely fell on her knees beside her.

"Not your daughter!" she exclaimed passionately.

Lady Selina opened her eyes at the touch of Cicely's hands. Something of the girl's determination may have flowed to her. Possibly, too, the presence of Grimshaw hardened her, although, deliberately, she ignored him. Her strength returned, the energy which she had never frittered away during a long, tranquil life.

"Is your mind really made up, Cicely? Is it?"

"Yes."

The firmness of tone was sufficiently convincing.

"You wish to marry a man who is against me, who sides with my enemies?"

Grimshaw answered her.

"I am not against *you*, Lady Selina. You belong to the old order. I belong to the new. I have never indicted your sincerity of purpose. I hope you won't indict mine."

She shrugged her shoulders, saying with finality:

"I stick to my order. I can't change. We don't change."

He came nearer.

"But—your son changed."

"What——?"

Obviously, she considered herself challenged, and unfairly challenged. She sat up. Her eyes sparkled. She spoke with intensity:

"He did not change. My boy stood by me always—always."

"He changed after he had faced—realities."

Cicely was no longer on her knees. She had risen, when

Digitized by Google

Grimshaw approached, retreating a little, divining somehow that her lover was about to use a weapon of which she knew nothing. But the weapon, when she saw it, inspired little confidence. Brian, so far as she was aware, had not changed. Were he alive, he would stand beside his mother now and always, as she affirmed with such poignant conviction. None the less faith in her lover remained constant.

Lady Selina addressed Cicely, not Grimshaw.

"Do you remember, child, that Brian came home on leave shortly after Mr. Grimshaw left Upworthy to go to France?"

"I remember."

"Your brother was Mr. Grimshaw's friend, and fully alive to his many sterling qualities and, and—attractions. Because of these he guessed what might happen. And he warned me. And, as I say, I laughed at him. Brian would say, if he were present, what I am about to say."

She paused to select the right words, thinking not only of her son but of her husband. Brian, possibly, was more Danecourt than Chandos, and dearer to the mother on that account. But in matters which concerned the women of his family he was unquestionably his father's son, a stickler for tradition, an upholder of the unwritten law which forbade marriage between persons of unequal social position. She continued with austere solemnity:

"I can hardly believe, Cicely, that you have considered what is at stake. This big property was left to me to pass on to a successor, to a child whom your dear father and I believed to be bone of our bone, sharing our ideas and governing principles, content, like us, to walk in the old ways, to carry on our work. Brian would have done so. But he died——"

Her voice died away mournfully.

Cicely edged nearer, much moved. But when she at-

Digitized by Google

tempted to take her mother's hand, Lady Selina repulsed her, saying quietly:

"I am speaking now for Brian, for your father, and for myself. If you decide to marry what I firmly believe to be the wrong man, Upworthy and all it includes will go to your cousin George."

Cicely gazed incredulously at her mother. Slowly, incredulity vanished. The familiar figure of Brian took its place. He stood between her and happiness. He had been resurrected from the dead for this one inflexible purpose. Then he, too, melted away, and she beheld Upworthy, the village with its pretty thatched cottages, the rich pastures, and beyond them the woods and uplands—an Arcadian paradise out of which Brian was driving her——

Lastly, she perceived her cousin George, lord of this goodly manor. She had never liked George. And he was one of the "Indispensables" at the War Office, a-glitter with decorations not earned upon the field of battle. The last time she had talked to George, he had held forth prosingly upon the good old days before the war. Whatever happened, George would "carry on" in the easy grooves, and be more concerned about breeding pheasants than the housing of peasants——

Her mind cleared as she glanced at Grimshaw. Here stood the flesh-and-blood reality, the man of her choice. Their eyes met, flashing. Each disdained Cupid's adventitious lures and guiles. He seemed to be saying: "Read me! Look well before you leap!"

Accordingly, she looked deep into a mind and heart open for her inspection. Then she leapt without fear.

"If I have to choose between Upworthy and my lover, I take him."

With a noble gesture she held out her hand. Grimshaw took it, holding it tenderly.

Digitized by Google

"I am the proudest and happiest man in the kingdom."

Lady Selina, not untouched, and sensible, perhaps, that duty was goading her on along the appointed path, observed judicially:

"I have spoken for my dead son, you understand?"

"But not his last word?" said Grimshaw.

"Not his last word?" she repeated. "What can you mean?"

"I have a letter from him, written just before he went. He spoke in that letter of you, Lady Selina, and of Upworthy, and of me."

"Have you seen this letter, Cicely?" asked Lady Selina.

"No."

"No one has seen it," said Grimshaw, "except myself. I brought it with me this morning."

"Please give it to me."

She held out a trembling hand. Grimshaw took an envelope from his pocket. Lady Selina saw the familiar writing through a mist of unshed tears.

"I c-can't read it," she faltered.

"May I?" Cicely asked eagerly. Hardly waiting for an affirmative, she took the letter and glanced at it.

"Oh-h-h!"

"What is it, child?"

"It is dated only two days before he died."

"Read it aloud."

As Cicely obeyed, the mother covered her face with her hand. Cicely's voice faltered and broke more than once, but she read on and on till almost the end.

"'My dear old Grimmer,—I shall be over the top in a few hours, and mayn't come back. In the old days you tried to make me think. I've had to do it out here. If there isn't a purpose behind all this slaughter, one must come out of it. I see now it's up to us to do what we can, not only at the Front, but where our men come from. They deserve it. By God! they do. I know at long last that I

Digitized by Google

was wrong not to back you up about our village. I sided with my mother. She's the dearest thing, but however beautiful the past may be, we can't live in it. And she does. If Upworthy ever comes to me, I'll do what you want, if it costs me my last bob. I should like to see England come out of this splendid all through. It might be so, and it isn't. If things go wrong, tell my mother this some day, but not yet, because she isn't ripe for it. If I know her, she'll try to do something for me that I can't do for myself. She always did. There's one more thing heavy on my mind——' "

Cicely paused.

"Go on!"

The command was almost inaudible. Cicely read on:

" 'It's about Cis. I put a spoke in your wheel because I shared Mother's ideas about suitable matches, and all that. Now, whether I win through or not, I hope that you and she will come together. Bless you both!' "

Silently, Grimshaw moved to the window and stood with his back to the two women. He could see the trim lawn, once more in order. The gap through which the excited villagers had burst their way was still open. He heard Lady Selina's voice:

"Give me the letter, child."

For a moment, Lady Selina held the letter, murmuring: "My son!—my son!"

Then she re-read it, Cicely kneeling beside her, hiding her tear-stained face in her mother's lap. The letter fluttered to the ground. Cicely felt her mother's hand upon her head.

"I—I wonder if he knows?"

Cicely looked up.

"What should he know, Mother?"

"He might know that his message to me has been delivered, and——"

"And——?"

"And accepted."

Digitized by Google

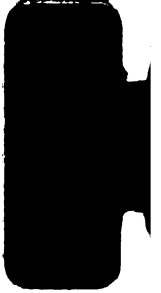
Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

This book should be returned to the Library on or before the last date stamped below.

A fine is incurred by retaining it beyond the specified time.

Please return promptly.



Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google